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**THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST:**  
**A CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL STUDY OF THE ASCENSION IN**  
**LUKE-ACTS AND IN THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN CONTEXTS**

**JUSTIN ALEXANDRU MIHOC**

**MA by Research**  
**Durham University**  
**Department of Theology and Religion**

**2010**

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the present dissertation is to analyse and interpret the Ascension of Jesus as described in Luke-Acts, and to examine both the Jewish rapture traditions and the early Christian reception and interpretation of the Lukan accounts. In my research, I tried to explain how the Ascension event was shaped by Luke and the impact it had within the Christian Church of the first centuries.

The first chapter tackles the history of research on the Ascension and the proposed methodology. Following this, the second section of the thesis analyses the Jewish assumption (rapture) traditions found in both canonical and pseudepigraphal writings. The common elements between these traditions and the Ascension of Christ are observed in order to establish a certain dependence of the Ascension narrative on Jewish rapture accounts.

In the third chapter, I examine the two Ascension accounts in Luke-Acts (Lk 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11) and aim to explain the apparent inconsistencies between them. Certain aspects, such as redundancy and variations, are discussed in detail in the third section of this chapter.

The fourth chapter focuses on the reception and interpretation of the Lukan Ascension narratives within the early Christian Church (the pre-Nicene period). Finally, a summary of the entire thesis and some final remarks are drawn in the conclusion of the present study.

Two excursuses relevant to this research are included in the appendices: the first on the Jewish Hekhalot literature and Merkabah mysticism; and the second examining the Ascension in the Gospels according to Mark (16:19-20 of the 'longer ending') and John (20:17).

*This dissertation is the product of my own work, and the work of others has been properly acknowledged throughout.*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

LXX	The Septuagint
AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACCS – NT/OT	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – New Testament/Old Testament
AnBib	Analecta Biblica. Investigationes Scientifica in Res Biblicas
ANCL	Alexander ROBERTS and James DONALDSON (eds.), <i>Ante-Nicene Christian Library</i> (24 vols.)
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
CUP	Cambridge University Press
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
Hermeneia	Hermeneia. A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
ICC	The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament
IBMBOR	Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (Biblical and Mission Institute's Publishing Office of the Romanian Orthodox Church)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup/LNTS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series/Library of New Testament Studies
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Supplement Series
KEK	Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
NA <sup>27</sup>	Nestle-Aland, <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , 27 <sup>th</sup> edition.
<i>NJBC</i>	<i>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
<i>NPNF</i>	Philip Schaff's <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> (2 series: 28 vols.)
<i>NRSV</i>	<i>Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OTP</i>	Charlesworth's <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (2 vols.)
OUP	Oxford University Press



SAP	Sheffield Academic Press
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature – Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature – Monograph Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature – Semeia Studies
SNTS MS	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas – Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina Series
SVS	St Vladimir’s Seminary
TynNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>VetT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche</i>

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Ascension of Christ to Heaven can be said to be one of the most notable and influential events within Christian doctrine. It represents both an ending (that of Christ's earthly presence) and a beginning (the beginning of the Apostles' ministry). The synthesis of my argument is that of the compatibility or incompatibility of canonical literature (the initial meaning of the text) and its integration within Church tradition.

Luke, the 'beloved physician' and evangelist,<sup>1</sup> is the only New Testament writer to record a visible Ascension of Christ.<sup>2</sup> He presents the Ascension event twice (Luke 24:50-52 and Acts 1:9-11), as the culmination and climax of his gospel and as the element of the beginning in the introduction of his second volume, Acts of the Apostles. The Ascension was pre-signified by prophecies of the Old Testament and the tradition of rapture stories.<sup>3</sup>

In this introduction I shall present a history of the research on the Ascension in Luke and Acts, with a special emphasis on the development of doctrine and interpretation of the Lukan texts in the last century. The previous studies will be reviewed both in thematic (topic-related) and chronological order, beginning with German scholarship. Also, the proposed methodology and research questions will be introduced in the second part of the present chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> On the authorship of Luke-Acts it is argued that the two-volume book might be an edited version of some material preserved from Luke by an anonymous Christian writer towards the end of the first century. 'It is *possible* that Luke, Paul's companion, is the source for the "we" passages in Acts and perhaps for more of the material in Acts 13-28. This Luke would be a second generation Christian. (Paul must be considered a first generation Christian.) Towards the end of the first century a third generation Christian – who had not accompanied Paul – using Luke as his authority for the latter half of Acts composed Luke-Acts.' STERLING 1992: 326. However, the majority of biblical scholars recognise Luke, a Syrian of Antioch, as the author of Luke-Acts. 'One should accept the tradition that Luke composed this Gospel [and, subsequently, Acts], for there seems no reason why anyone in the ancient church would invent this datum and make a relatively obscure figure the author of a Gospel.' KARRIS 1995 (*NJBC* 43:2): 648. Therefore, when referring to the designation of author of Luke-Acts, I will always use Luke.

<sup>2</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 908.

<sup>3</sup> Old Testament figures were supposed to be taken up to heaven without dying. Some of the most important are: Enoch, Elijah, Moses, Ezra and Baruch.

## 1.1 History of Research on Ascension in Luke-Acts

A complete presentation of the research on the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles in the modern period was compiled by François Bovon, in his volume entitled *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-five Years of Research (1950-2005)*<sup>4</sup>, containing both a thematic evaluation and a comprehensive bibliography and indexes. Moreover, an overview of the ascension account in Luke and Acts was produced by A.W. Zwiep in his doctoral dissertation presented at Durham University under the supervision of Prof. Dr. J.D.G. Dunn in 1996, and published a year later.<sup>5</sup>

Before this exhaustive presentation of the Lukan ascension narratives some endeavours were made, both in doctrinal and text-critical directions. One of the first modern approaches to the Ascension was that of D.F. Strauß<sup>6</sup>, who argued against a physical elevation of Jesus and regarded it as a ‘myth’. He refused the rationalist view, which he considered in conflict with the meaning of the text, and stressed that the Ascension was never meant to be taken *ad literam*.<sup>7</sup> The myth-hypothesis presented by Strauß was later developed by Adolf von Harnack.<sup>8</sup> He affirmed that in the preaching of the early church the Ascension was linked to resurrection-exaltation, and thus Luke resorted to a primitive tradition when composing his works. Later on, Eduard Meyer<sup>9</sup> tried to recreate the historical context of the Ascension tradition and concluded that Acts 1:2-14 represented a second-century interpolation.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars argued that a Gnostic interpolation in Acts is not viable, and suggested that the two accounts agree in terms of the information presented.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning with the publication of Victorien C. Larrañaga’s voluminous dissertation,<sup>12</sup> the study of Ascension developed into a serious enterprise. He responded to Harnack’s and Meyer’s theories by trying to establish the original text of the Ascension accounts, based on manuscripts and early patristic evidence. Larrañaga’s conclusion was that the

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<sup>4</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed., 2006.

<sup>5</sup> *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology*, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> STRAUß 1840: 642-662.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by ZWIEP 1997: 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> HARNACK 1908: 126-127: ‘Dagegen ist die leibliche Himmelfahrt ohne Zweifel eine Erzählung, die sich im Kreise der Elfe gebildet haben kann.’

<sup>9</sup> MEYER 1921: 34-46.

<sup>10</sup> MEYER 1921: 36.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. ZWIEP 1997: 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> *L’Ascension de Notre-Seigneur dans la Nouveau Testament*, 1938.

Alexandrian text-type (oriental recension) represented the most accurate version of the texts (Lk 24:50-53 and Acts 1:2, 9). In his opinion, both passages describe the same event and do not reflect a legendary evolution. The most important contribution to the ascension subject, since the work of Larrañaga, was for a long time the extensive article of Pierre Benoit<sup>13</sup>. In his article he reached the conclusions that the tradition of the forty days was established only in the fourth century<sup>14</sup>, that the elevation was corporal because a physical resurrection implies a physical ascension as well, and that the Ascension episode represented the Messiah's last appearance which took place simultaneously with the resurrection and exaltation, tradition attested since the primitive church.<sup>15</sup> Luke may have received the information about the appearances during a forty day period after writing his first volume.<sup>16</sup> Alfred Plummer, in his commentary on Luke's Gospel, suggests that Luke's intention was to reserve the Ascension narrative for Acts, but at least a final departure is meant in Luke 24:50-53. The mark of Luke's style continues to the end and, by this, the idea of a later interpolation is excluded.<sup>17</sup> Although Larrañaga and Benoit are considered two of the most influential writers on the Ascension studies, the majority of scholars do not accept the physical-elevation idea, an important author on the demythologisation of the Ascension story being Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>18</sup> It can be easily observed that the scholarship on the subject has been dominated for a long period by German authors. Apart from Larrañaga and Benoit, Henry Barclay Swete was the only non-German scholar to write two books related to the subject: one on the appearances of Christ after the Resurrection<sup>19</sup> and another one on the Ascension<sup>20</sup>.

Swete thinks that Jerusalem was the destined scene of the beginnings of the Church's life and work, and that 'it was in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem that the last events of

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<sup>13</sup> 'L'Ascension', 1949: 161-203.

<sup>14</sup> 'It was only from the 4<sup>th</sup> century that the tradition of an Ascension after forty days became established in the Church beyond dispute.' BENOIT 1973: 220 n. 6; cf. LARRAÑAGA 1938: 570-601.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. BOVON 2006: 191-192.

<sup>16</sup> The same idea is shared by PLUMMER 1901: 564-571. According to Plummer, Luke probably did not know the exact amount of time between the Resurrection and the Ascension, but he gained this information between the publication of the Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles.

<sup>17</sup> PLUMMER 1901: 565.

<sup>18</sup> BULTMANN 1941, cited by ZWIEP 1997: 11. He stressed that the ascension account is a popular legend, as a consequence of the materialization of the Easter appearances. Cf. BOVON 2006: 192.

<sup>19</sup> SWETE 1908.

<sup>20</sup> SWETE 1911.

the forty days must take place'<sup>21</sup>. He supposes that the Luke 24:44-47 narrative took place the Sunday before the Ascension and the rest of the gospel's text refers to the day of Ascension.<sup>22</sup> The last appearance of Jesus before his Ascension began with the eleven in Jerusalem, probably in the upper room of the house, but ended on the Mount of Olives, somewhere in the direction of Bethany (today: *el 'Azaryeh*). The commentator criticises the traditional site of the Ascension<sup>23</sup> suggesting that the position of the summit was too near to Jerusalem and in full view of the city.<sup>24</sup> Thinking of the Ascension as a physical translation from earth, through the atmosphere, into heaven is a misreading of the historical fact, and a misapprehension of the inner truth which it represents. The author's interpretation of the Ascension scene is that 'it is a fact, as we believe, that forty days more or less after the Resurrection the Lord finally withdrew His risen body from the eyes and touch of His disciples, and that in the moment of His disappearance He was enveloped by a passing cloud, which travelled upwards as if it were carrying Him up to heaven. And this fact was the symbol of a great and vital Christian truth, which is also a fact, but in a spiritual world.'<sup>25</sup> Swete thinks that the Ascension represents the end of the appearances after the Resurrection and that it was a spiritual elevation from this physical world. The exalted life of the Lord has the purpose of direct action upon the living Church. By being 'at the right hand of God' he is paradoxically in our midst, and the Ascension implies a return in the same way as the withdrawal (reappearance).<sup>26</sup>

One of the most important British critical studies on the Ascension was that by J.G. Davies, in 1958. Through a careful historical study of the importance of the doctrine for the early Church, and through a systematic attempt to state its importance for the twentieth-century Christian, Davies tries to demonstrate that the Ascension episode was

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<sup>21</sup> SWETE 1908: 92.

<sup>22</sup> SWETE 1908: 97.

<sup>23</sup> According to the pilgrim Egeria (Etheria), the traditional place of Christ's Ascension was the summit of the Mount of Olives and, more precisely, where Imbomon church was built to commemorate the great event and to mark the Ascension site. 'And from here [the church of Eleona], around the sixth hour of the night, everyone goes up to the Imbomon, singing hymns. That is the place from which the Lord ascended into heaven.' *Itinerarium Egeriae* 35, in GINGARAS 1970: 108. Cf. also *Itinerarium Egeriae* 31; 43; 49.

<sup>24</sup> 'We must think rather of some place on or near the Bethany road, about half way between Bethany and Jerusalem, sufficiently remote from both and yet within sight of the former at least.' SWETE 1908:103.

<sup>25</sup> SWETE 1908: 105.

<sup>26</sup> SWETE 1908: 108-109.

a part of the primitive *kerygma*, and unquestioned in the early Church.<sup>27</sup> He begins by presenting the prophecies of the Ascension in the Old Testament, linking them to Luke's accounts on the elevation of Christ. He stresses that the Ascension occurred on the same day as the resurrection<sup>28</sup> and that it represented the climax of the redemptive act of God.<sup>29</sup>

In the period of *Redaktionsgeschichte*, the studies of Hans Conzelmann (on Luke)<sup>30</sup> and Ernst Haenchen (Acts)<sup>31</sup> focused on the selection and the process of organising the materials that formed the basis of Luke's two-book opus. According to Conzelmann, the resurrection appearances and the later appearances are different, in the way that the second ones do not occur from Heaven (the appearances within the forty days).<sup>32</sup> The Ascension is seen as having a twofold meaning: as an act of exaltation (Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and his appearances are now from Heaven) and as a parallel to the Parousia. Conzelmann stresses that Luke 'used tradition to express his own conception'<sup>33</sup>. There is a further period of time until the Pentecost is introduced by Luke at the end of his gospel, and therefore, 'the Ascension does not form the conclusion of the first, but the beginning of the second volume of Luke's historical account' (p. 204)<sup>34</sup>. In the author's opinion, the Ascension marks the limit of Jesus' stay on earth and the beginning of his heavenly reign.<sup>35</sup> Haenchen demonstrated that, in comparison with later apocryphal ascension stories, the text of Luke avoids legendary details and

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<sup>27</sup> In his mention on the work of Davies, Parsons appreciated that only 'a few studies, like J.G. Davies' *He Ascended into Heaven*, have attempted to deal with all the New Testament references to the ascension as well as the creedal and patristic evidence in a comprehensive history of doctrine. Davies' systematic analysis, though a helpful historical survey, was not sensitive to the distinction between references to the ascension which attempt to describe Christ's exaltation and narratives of the ascension which attempt to describe the events itself.' PARSONS 1987: 14.

<sup>28</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 12.

<sup>29</sup> Davies 1958: 171.

<sup>30</sup> CONZELMANN 1961: 202-206.

<sup>31</sup> HAENCHEN 1956; cf. HAENCHEN 1963: 155-187.

<sup>32</sup> 'Such appearances presuppose the Ascension and are of a different kind, for they establish no relationship with the Lord in the special sense that the Resurrection appearances do.' CONZELMANN 1961: 203-204.

<sup>33</sup> CONZELMANN 1961: 204.

<sup>34</sup> 'More precisely, Conzelmann marked the period of post-Easter appearances up to the ascension as "eine heilige Zeit zwischen den Zeiten" and the period between ascension and Pentecost as "ein geistloser Zwischenraum".' ZWIEP 1997: 13.

<sup>35</sup> 'The next event after the Ascension in the series of mighty acts no longer affects the course of events in Jesus' life, and the Church only secondarily, but it affects the Church directly the outpouring of the Spirit.' CONZELMANN 1961: 206.

personal impressions, and that Luke's aim was not to give a spectacular account of the Ascension, but only to present the historical event.<sup>36</sup>

P.A. Stempvoort argued that the two Ascension accounts (Luke 24 and Acts 1) are in fact two complementary interpretations of the same story: 'In comparing these two interpretations, we hold that they are a twofold interpretation of the same events of the Christophanies, one interpretation not excluding the other, one filling the gaps in the other.'<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, C.H. Talbert considered that there may be two distinct traditions behind the Lukan Ascension narratives. Nevertheless, he demonstrated that both the style and architecture of the passages belong to Luke's literary creation.<sup>38</sup> G. Haufe<sup>39</sup> argued upon the idea that a pre-Lukan ascension tradition may be found in the Jewish *Entrückung* narratives. Zwiep, discussing Haufe's hypothesis, said that 'on the basis of the rapture-preservation pattern in the Jewish rapture stories of Enoch, Elijah, Moses, Baruch and Ezra, he [i.e. Haufe] concluded that only those historical figures which were physically taken up to God could exercise an eschatological role.'<sup>40</sup>

Gottfried Schille and Rudolf Pesch maintained the idea of a pre-Lukan origin of the composition, and attempted to uncover an early-tradition stratum of the Ascension story. Schille<sup>41</sup> identified some elements that betray a liturgical concern, belonging to the feast of the Ascension in the Jerusalem Church, and argued that Acts 1:9-11 may have been taken out of a larger narrative unit. His thesis was criticised by S.G. Wilson, who considered Luke more than a mere editor of a previous tradition, and that he must be recognised as an author and theologian.<sup>42</sup> Following Schille and Haenchen, Pesch thought that Luke's accounts are inspired by the Elijah traditions, thus various pre-Lukan sources<sup>43</sup>, and even tried to reconstruct the original source composition.<sup>44</sup> Lately,

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<sup>36</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 14.

<sup>37</sup> STEMPVOORT 1958-1959: 42.

<sup>38</sup> TALBERT 1974: 61.

<sup>39</sup> HAUFE 1961: 105-113.

<sup>40</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 17.

<sup>41</sup> SCHILLE 1966: 183-199.

<sup>42</sup> 'There is no good reason to suppose that Acts 1:9-11 is a unit of pre-Lukan tradition whose original *Sitz im Leben* was the worship of the early Jerusalem Christians. Much of the evidence points to a Lukan origin, and certainly none of it is irreconcilable with his view.' WILSON 1968: 274.

<sup>43</sup> 'Lukas hat die ihm vorgegebene Tradition von der *Entrückung* Jesu bewusst aufgegriffen und ausgestaltet, da sie ihm erlaubte, das Kerygma von der Erhöhung Jesu von dem seiner Auferweckung zu unterscheiden und an das Augenzeugnis der Apostel zu binden.' PESCH 1986: 74.

<sup>44</sup> The reconstructed passage in Greek can be found in ZWIEP 1997: 20.

the originality of the Ascension accounts in Luke-Acts was defended by Charles G. Kosanke in his doctoral dissertation.<sup>45</sup>

A more comprehensive study of the Ascension, which analyses both the Lukan text and their parallels, is the doctoral thesis of Gerhard Lohfink (1971). His purpose was to explore the history of the ascension tradition and to determine that this tradition developed out of the exaltation kerygma. Lohfink makes a distinction, based on Greco-Roman, Jewish and Old Testament texts, between two forms of ascension: the heavenly journey or sometimes vision (*Himmelsreise*) of the soul and the actual translation or rapture (*Entrückung*).<sup>46</sup> The second is characterised by elevation (not only the soul is taken up), the disappearance of the ascendant one, and its occurrence at the end of the person's earthly life.<sup>47</sup> Lohfink demonstrates that both of Luke's narratives are his own composition based on earlier traditions and, thus, that both belong to the rapture type (form-critically).<sup>48</sup> Through redaction-critical analysis the hypothesis that two different traditions stood behind the Lukan composition was rejected, the two accounts both being the result of Luke's composition technique. In his conclusion, Lohfink states that Luke's Ascension narratives do not describe a historical event in time and space, and assigns the entire report to a literary activity.<sup>49</sup> Lohfink's ideas on the Ascension strongly influenced Richard Dillon, who shares the same view in his dissertation on Luke 24.<sup>50</sup> In Dillon's outlook, the Ascension is a central point of Luke's works, being

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<sup>45</sup> 'Our survey on the Ascension tradition in the NT has found no evidence for a pre-Lukan tradition containing an Ascension account such as we find in Luke-Acts. (The references in Mk. 16:19 and Jn. 20:17 are later than Luke-Acts.)' KOSANKE 1993: 79.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. LOHFINK 1971: 32-42.

<sup>47</sup> 'Unlike the heavenly journeys and assumptions of the soul, a rapture is concerned with a physical taking up of a human being into Paradise of heaven as the final conclusion of his earthly life (Enoch, Elijah, Ezra and Baruch). The ascent after an appearance of a heavenly being (an angel, the angel of YHWH or YHWH himself) is in fact a return to heaven.' ZWIEP 1997: 22.

<sup>48</sup> 'Da sich die beiden lukanischen Texte ausgezeichnet in dieses Grundschema einfügen, müssen sie als Entrückungserzählungen klassifiziert werden. Die Himmelfahrt Jesu wird also von Lukas als Entrückung dargestellt und zu Wort gebracht.' LOHFINK 1971: 242.

<sup>49</sup> 'A last section deals with the question of the historicity of the ascension. Lohfink finds an answer in the distinction between historical and real. Just like the resurrection, the ascension-elevation is a real phenomenon, but it escapes historical investigation. Luke has historicised an event in the style of OT writers. This support gives warrant to and legitimizes his undertaking.' BOVON 2006: 198; DONNE, in his theological study on the Ascension, considers that if the historicity of the resurrection is vouched for by the appearance of the risen Christ, then the Ascension must also have a place in history to indicate that he would no longer appear in that way until the Parousia. DONNE 1983: 22-25.

<sup>50</sup> 'While many have been won over to the view that, as an event distinct from the resurrection and terminus of the christophanies, the ascension originated in the thought of St. Luke, we should rather keep an open mind towards the possibility, urged by others, that Luke was not the first to recount this terminal



placed in the gospel's finale and in the opening of Acts. He observed a phenomenon of 'compression' in Luke's gospel narration; 'Luke is not primarily interested in the external time-framework of the paschal Easter occurrence, but in their inner unity and totality. It is the complete Easter occurrence, the sum of its several components, scripturally ordained and editorially condensed "on the third day" that he expounds in the schema of a single day's course.'<sup>51</sup> For Luke, it is essential not to narrate a chronological fact, but to express the truth. The endpoint of the gospel represents the episode of the Ascension together with the Resurrection, and this was the interest of the author in the narrative corpus.

François Bovon objected to Lohfink's (and, respectively, Dillon's) ideas that challenge the legitimacy of the need to distinguish the visible ascension from rapture (or assumption of the soul/vision). 'Is it necessary at this point to distinguish between the ascension (visible) and the elevation (invisible) and, consequently, isolate Luke from the rest of the NT? Are not John and Hebrews, by insisting on the elevation, closer to Luke than Lohfink is willing to admit?'<sup>52</sup> John F. Maile argues that both Luke 24 and Acts 1 represent the conclusion of the resurrection appearances. Maile (as well as Lohfink) thinks that the number of forty days represents a biblical number: 'The number corresponds to Luke's use of Jerusalem as a geographical pointer, both geography and chronology being employed to join together the time of Jesus and the time of the Church.'<sup>53</sup> He sees the Ascension as the culmination of the appearances and the confirmation of the exaltation. In Maile's view, this episode is also the prelude to the Pentecost (the sending of the Spirit) and the pledge of the return of Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Mikeal C. Parsons' study on the Ascension<sup>55</sup> examined in detail, through various methods of historical criticism (textual, form, source, redaction) and 'narrative analysis', how the two narratives function. He defended the priority of the Western text

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episode, hence that either his gospel ending, or the Acts account, or both, rest upon tradition he received.' DILLON 1978: 174-175.

<sup>51</sup> DILLON 1978: 181.

<sup>52</sup> BOVON 2006: 198. He rejects any redaction hypothesis in the case of Acts 1; however, BOVON felt that LOHFINK's arguments were more convincing for Luke 24. The same view is shared by PARSONS 1987: 62-63.

<sup>53</sup> MAILE 1986: 52.

<sup>54</sup> 'For Luke the ascension is not just the confirmation of a present reality but also the certain pledge of a future consummation.' MAILE 1986: 58.

<sup>55</sup> *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (1987) represents an extensive revision of his doctoral dissertation.

(or Western non-interpolations) in Luke 24,<sup>56</sup> opting for the shorter version which has no mention of the Ascension.<sup>57</sup> The original version, he concludes, mentioned Jesus' departure but not specifically his ascension.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, he analysed Acts 1:1-11 as an introduction to the story and offered arguments for a possible rapture tradition behind the Lukan text.<sup>59</sup> Parsons concluded by saying that 'the similarities and differences between the two narratives are best explained not in terms of interpolation or sources theories, but in terms of their literary function.'<sup>60</sup>

In the quest of identifying the genre of Acts, Richard I. Pervo remains suspicious about the historicity of Acts and disregards the idea that Luke was a historian. His central concern became the 'enigma thus produced: a Luke who was a bumbling and incompetent as a historian yet brilliant and creative as an author.'<sup>61</sup> He acknowledges that the prefaces and speeches in Acts are consistent with ancient historiography, but stresses that their presence alone is insufficient to establish the genre of Acts as historiography.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, David E. Aune<sup>63</sup> suggests that Luke may be considered the creator of a new genre of Church History. Following Haenchen<sup>64</sup>, he suggests that 'Luke, rather than Eusebius (of Caesarea), should be credited with creating the *new* genre of church history. His achievement is remarkable in view of the early date of his work (ca. A.D. 90) and the long period that elapsed before he found an imitator

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<sup>56</sup> The consensus regarding the longer non-Western text was also challenged by M.-É. BOISMARD and A. LAMOUILLE; cited by ZWIEP 1996: 220-221. 'For the sake of fairness it must be borne in mind that their [i.e. of BOISMARD and LAMOUILLE] conclusions form a part of a larger theory on the composition of Luke-Acts as a whole.' ZWIEP 1997: 32.

<sup>57</sup> 'It may seem best to regard the non-interpolations in Luke 24:51-52 as doubtful and to account them as efforts to enhance and elevate Lukan Christology, as Parsons has suggested. Otherwise we have little recourse but to agree with Fitzmeyer, who says, *Why Luke has dated the ascension of Jesus in these two different ways no one will ever know.*' TYSON 2006: 108.

<sup>58</sup> In the most recent study on Codex Bezae, Joseph RIUS-CAMPS and Jenny READ-HEIMERDINGER defend the shorter ending of Luke's gospel. RIUS-CAMPS; READ-HEIMERDINGER 2004: 88-89.

<sup>59</sup> However, PARSONS is less certain than LOHFINK that Luke used a certain tradition, but he accepts the idea of redaction of a primitive ascension story into a farewell scene. 'In Acts, Luke expanded the ascension narrative by means of *apocalyptic stage-props* so that the departure of Jesus in his sequel volume provides the impetus for the gift of the Spirit and the mission of the church.' PARSONS 1987: 150.

<sup>60</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 31.

<sup>61</sup> PERVO 1987: 3.

<sup>62</sup> PHILLIPS (2006: 369-370) stresses that 'for Pervo, many of the literary themes (e.g. persecution, conspiracies, riots and travels) and literary devices (e.g. wit and irony) in Acts would have entertained ancient readers and encouraged them to read Acts as something other than historiography.' In his opinion, Acts is seen as a novel because it was popular (as opposed to historical writings) and maintained a deeper interest in entertaining its readers than did the learned historiography of the time.

<sup>63</sup> 1988.

<sup>64</sup> HAENCHEN 1966: 258-278.

and continuator in Eusebius.’<sup>65</sup> This idea is shared also by Daniel Marguerat who argues that the genre of Luke’s writings can be that of an *apologetic history*.<sup>66</sup>

In the discussion on Luke’s purpose of writing his works, Stephen J. Binz demonstrated that in his gospel the author prepares Jesus’ exodus (9:31) which ends with the Ascension. The journey to the Father begins in Jerusalem (9:51) and ends near Jerusalem. The purpose of the Ascension narrative in the gospel is to show the glorification of Jesus, whereas in Acts it represents the prelude for a new era (of the Church).<sup>67</sup> H. Douglas Buckwalter stresses that Luke’s purpose of focusing on Jesus’ baptism and Ascension was ‘both to fend off a Gnostic move to separate spirit and flesh in Jesus and to endorse the church’s belief in the full humanity of Jesus’.<sup>68</sup>

Christopher Francis Evans defended the unity of Luke-Acts suggesting that it was a two-volume work separated into two separate books for inclusion into different parts of the New Testament Canon. Furthermore, he implies that the ending of the gospel and the beginning of the Acts are later interpolations because of this reason.<sup>69</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, however, does not agree with the assumption that because of some manuscripts’ omission of the phrase *carried up into heaven* (Luke 24:51) and because it

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<sup>65</sup> AUNE 1988: 139. In AUNE’s view, the literary model and source for Luke was the Gospel of Mark, which he modified. ‘He framed Mark with large blocks of narrative material. He wrote Mark in a more elevated literary style. Following the Hellenistic convention of using one source at a time, he intercalated a large section of Jesus’ teachings from another source (Q) into the middle of Mark (9:51-18:14). The many parallels between Luke and Acts reveal the author’s intention to provide the kind of literary unity for his second book that he had achieved in his first. Mark was a direct model for Luke’s first book, and an indirect model for his second.’ (p. 139)

<sup>66</sup> ‘A rejection of a political apology does not lead us to ignore the indisputable apologetic intentions that are found throughout the book of Acts.’ MARGUERAT 2002: 29. In this respect he follows STERLING who writes: ‘Did apologetic historiography play a decisive role in the writing of Luke-Acts? I believe it did. The author shared the same outlook as the writers of this genre: they belonged to subgroups within the larger Greco-Roman world. It was this consciousness which led them to write the story of their group (Content). Common to all of the works is the emphasis on the antiquity of the group;’ and concludes by saying that ‘the creative transformation of apologetic historiography laid the basis for subsequent Christian historiography.’ STERLING 1992: 386-387, 389.

<sup>67</sup> ‘In the Gospel, the ascension occurs on the same day as the resurrection, whereas in Acts 1:9-11, it took place forty days later. The essential affirmation of both accounts is that Jesus is with the Father in glory.’ BINZ 1989: 98.

<sup>68</sup> BUCKWALTER 1996: 8.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Verses 50-53 are transitional, and end somewhat lamely as the conclusion of the book.’ EVANS 1990: 297.

seems to duplicate the Ascension scene in Acts, the phrase represents a later interpolation.<sup>70</sup>

Recently two scholars (Pervo and Parsons) questioned the assumed idea of the unity between Luke and Acts, with arguments such as the differences in genre, narrative and theology.<sup>71</sup> Based on the reception-history argument, Andrew Gregory<sup>72</sup> argues upon the Luke-Acts unity hypothesis through analysing the way in which Irenaeus and the Muratorian Fragment link the ending of the gospel to the beginning of Acts.<sup>73</sup> The idea of unity is also shared by Patricia Walters, who investigates both the internal and external evidence in support for the unity.<sup>74</sup> Markus Bockmuehl<sup>75</sup> agrees with the reception-history approach, affirming that this provides a range of plausible meanings for the original intention of the text. However, C. Kevin Rowe<sup>76</sup> contests the conclusions of Gregory on the basis that both Irenaeus and the Muratorian Fragment only claim a common authorship for Luke-Acts.<sup>77</sup> 'It is important to note that, in contrast to Parsons and Pervo, neither Gregory nor Rowe nor Bockmuehl denies a literary unity between Luke and Acts.'<sup>78</sup>

By far the most significant treatment of the Ascension is that of A.W. Zwiép's monograph (*The Ascension of The Messiah in Lukan Christology*). He systematically examines the ascension traditions in Luke and Acts, establishing the context of their understanding within early Christian thought. Following Lohfink, he classifies the two accounts (Luke 24 and Acts 1) as *rapture stories*<sup>79</sup>, comparing Jesus' Ascension with

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<sup>70</sup> 'In the preface of his second volume (Acts 1:2), Luke refers to Jesus 'having been taken up' (*analēmphthē*) even though he has not yet recounted the scene of Acts 1:9-11, so he was aware of his own earlier account.' JOHNSON 1991: 404.

<sup>71</sup> PARSONS; PERVO 1993.

<sup>72</sup> GREGORY 2003: 38-45.

<sup>73</sup> 'I found no external evidence to suggest that these two texts ever circulated together as a two-volume book, but did not conclude (as does Rowe) that this need call into question contemporary assumptions about the unity of Luke-Acts.' GREGORY 2007: 460.

<sup>74</sup> WALTERS 2008.

<sup>75</sup> BOCKMUEHL 2005: 163-166.

<sup>76</sup> ROWE 2005: 131-157.

<sup>77</sup> Most recently, Rowe declared: 'The point of my earlier article (i.e. 2005) was not to object to the historical-critical method as such but rather to note the way in which the reception history of Luke and Acts *in particular* creates hermeneutical problems for the assumptions that undergird standard scholarly practice.' ROWE 2007: 456.

<sup>78</sup> BIRD 2007: 438.

<sup>79</sup> He defines the notion of *rapture* (*Entrückung*) as 'a bodily translation into the *beyond* as the conclusion of one's earthly life without the intervention of death'. ZWIEP 2001: 331.

the assumption of Jewish figures:<sup>80</sup> ‘Whereas in the original Enoch and Elijah stories their rapture was in itself a crown to their career, later their rapture was seen as a precursory event which set them temporarily aside as it were for a future task in the eschaton... It seems then that the Jewish rapture-preservation scheme provides a very plausible context of comparison and horizon of understanding for a *sachgemässe* understanding of the Ascension of Jesus.’<sup>81</sup> Zwiep analyses Lukan Christology according to the resurrection-exaltation-ascension spectrum.<sup>82</sup> In his opinion, Luke assumes the primitive kerygma conjoining bodily resurrection with heavenly exaltation in one historical moment.<sup>83</sup> Luke is regarded both as an ‘outstanding historian’ and a ‘good storyteller’, and as a ‘committed theologian and evangelist’. In Zwiep’s view, the major purpose of Luke’s rapture Christology is to deal with the eschatological problem of the Parousia. Zwiep concludes that the Lukan Ascension story originated in the early tradition of Christian thought.<sup>84</sup>

A further and more recent study on the Ascension in Acts is the published doctoral thesis of Matthew Sleeman. Through a spatial interpretation (geographical theory) of the Ascension, he examines Acts 1:1-11:18, with special emphasis on the role of geography in constructing and communicating the theological message. His innovative approach is meant to fill particular gaps within Ascension scholarship. Beginning with a history of the research, the first part of the survey deals with a comparative examination of the Ascension, ‘a narrative appreciation of Acts and the inherent production of space within a narrative.’<sup>85</sup> Following Edward Soja’s understanding of time and space<sup>86</sup>, Sleeman

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<sup>80</sup> He concludes that ‘with the list of Enoch, Elijah, Moses, Ezra, Baruch and Phinehas (and perhaps Melchizedek) the Jewish rapture list seems to be exhausted’. ZWIEP 1997: 77.

<sup>81</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 78-79.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Lohfink and others have argued that Luke’s ascension stories really are the narrative expression of an idea that is in other texts connected more directly with Jesus’ resurrection, that is his exaltation. Zwiep, in reaction to this, argues that according to the Jewish *paradigm*, the end result is not *an act of enthronement or apotheosis*, but *preservation to fulfil some task in the end of time*.’ SMITH 2006: 87.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Whatever one may say about traditions and sources of the ascension narratives, the way Luke has positioned the ascension texts at the key point of his two-volume work (at the centre and the close of the first, in the opening chapter of the second book) suggests that the ascension of Jesus is of central significance to Luke... In structuring the narrative symmetrically, Luke has effected a unified composition.’ ZWIEP 1997: 115.

<sup>84</sup> ‘The constituent parts of Luke’s rapture Christology (the post-resurrection appearances, the biblical number of 40, the fact that the period of appearances had come to a close, the conviction of Jesus’ future return on the clouds of heaven) all have a firm basis in the Christian tradition prior to Luke.’ ZWIEP 1997: 198.

<sup>85</sup> SLEEMAN 2009: 57.

distinguishes a three-part schema of space, and sets the premises for a reading of Acts.<sup>87</sup> In the second part, he applies the selected methodology ('thirdspace analysis') to the biblical text, determining how space is organised and structured within Acts. The Ascension cloud is seen as an obvious separation between earth (first- and secondspace) and heaven (thirdspace).<sup>88</sup> He concludes by saying that his study 'has advanced understanding of the Ascension in Acts, its place within the narrative, and the role of geography in exegeting it. It has shown that Jesus' Ascension in Acts not only happens within the narrative, it also structures it'.<sup>89</sup>

From the area of doctrinal studies, two recent works on Ascension are worth mentioning. Douglas Farrow offers a substantial survey of the doctrine of the Ascension in its cosmological, ecclesiological and liturgical context. He defended the historical event of Christ's bodily Ascension by examining the development of Christian doctrine from the New Testament to the present day. 'The Ascension (not the resurrection or the Parousia) thus becomes the climax of Jesus-history and *the* eschatological event, fulfilling all prophetic hopes of Israel. And this eschatologizes what is left of history by setting it within the tension of his departure and still-impending return.'<sup>90</sup> The second study is the one by Geritt Scott Dawson, who offers an excellent example of confessional theology, focusing on the implication of the belief that the incarnate Jesus physically ascended into heaven. Following Farrow, Dawson analyses in the three part

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<sup>86</sup> Human geographer Edward W. SOJA defines 'historicism as an overdeveloped historical contextualisation of social life and social theory that actively submerges and peripheralizes the geographical of spatial imagination' (1989: 15). In Soja's thought, *Thirdspace* 'is another way of thinking about the social production of human spatiality that incorporates both Firstspace and Secondspace perspectives while at the same time opening up the scope and complexity of the geographical or spatial imagination' (2000: 11). His main work on thirdspatiality remains *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (1996), in which he defines the terminology used and explores the different space critiques. On a further discussion on the meaning of space, see: SACK 1980: 4-9.

<sup>87</sup> 'Firstspace refers to external, material *physical* spatiality, to the privileging of objectivity, to *the concrete and mappable geographies of our lifeworlds...* Soja also identifies *secondspace*, that is mental *projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies...* A thirdspace perspective opens up renewed ways of thinking about space, seeking to *break out from the constraining Big Dichotomy by introducing an-Other*.' SLEEMAN 2009: 44. For a further discussion on the 'third space theology' see: BAKER 2007: 137-154.

<sup>88</sup> SLEEMAN 2009: 77-78: 'Importantly, despite the fourfold proclamation of Christ's new location [i.e. heaven, in Acts 1:9], the watching disciples are kept by the cloud from seeing the ascended Jesus; a clear demarcation between earth and heaven remains. This preserves ascension thirdspace so sovereignly independent of mortal control throughout Acts, an important buffer against reducing the heavenly Christ to merely firstspatial or secondspatial categories.'

<sup>89</sup> SLEEMAN 2009: 236.

<sup>90</sup> FARROW 1999: 17.

survey the centrality of the Ascension within the Church and her theology: ‘The ascension rightly, bodily taught and preached calls us to a magnificent hope. Jesus holds title to our humanity as a pledge of future restoration.’<sup>91</sup>

On the ascension motif and rapture traditions in Jewish and Christian Literature, three studies are of great interest for our survey. Mary Dean-Otting<sup>92</sup> analyses the heavenly ascensions in the Jewish non-canonical texts, and differentiates the heavenly journey motif within the Hellenistic-Jewish literature from the other ancient literature ascension accounts.<sup>93</sup> Martha Himmelfarb examines the background of the ascent apocalypses and affirms that Ezekiel influenced the Enoch ascent narrative in the Book of Watchers<sup>94</sup>, which itself influenced the later ascent literature. The recent book by Adela Yarbro Collins<sup>95</sup> represents a collection of studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic literature. In this monograph the author examines cosmological motifs<sup>96</sup> in some ancient textual accounts (such as The Book of Watchers, The Testament of Levi, The Life of Adam and Eve, 2 Enoch and 3 Baruch) and links their common tradition to New Testament eschatology. On the significance of the apocalypses, Collins concludes by stating that ‘the two main emphases of the apocalypses, social-religious critique and mystical experience, were mutually supportive in their original context. Any retrieval of these texts should take into account, not only their aesthetic and traditionally religious qualities, but also their latent transformative power.’<sup>97</sup>

On the reception of Luke-Acts within the early Christian thought and the discussion of the theory of the theological interpretation of Scripture<sup>98</sup> I shall begin by mentioning the International East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars, a project of the

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<sup>91</sup> DAWSON 2004: 210.

<sup>92</sup> DEAN-OTTING 1984.

<sup>93</sup> Reviewing this monograph, Paula GOODER notes that ‘while it is true that Dean-Otting’s work largely consists of presenting the content of many texts of ascent, its value lies in drawing out their major motifs and common characteristics rather than imposing a predetermined structure onto those texts.’ GOODER 2006: 27.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Although ascent is a new development, the debt of 1 Enoch 14 to Ezekiel is profound... The line of descent is made clear by the wheels of the throne, which appear only in Ezekiel among biblical works and which no longer have a function in Enoch’s ascent, where the throne sits fixed in heaven.’ HIMMELFARB 1993: 10.

<sup>95</sup> *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (1996).

<sup>96</sup> Such as the seven heavens (chapter 2), numerical symbolism (chapter 3), the origin of the designation of Jesus as ‘Son of Man’ (chapter 4), the origin of Christian baptism (chapter 7).

<sup>97</sup> COLLINS 1996: 20.

<sup>98</sup> For an extensive study on the Patristic exegesis with a substantial bibliography, see: KANNENGIESSER 2004 (2 vols.); see also the theological commentary on the Book of Acts by Jaroslav PELIKAN (2005).

Eastern Europe Liaison Committee of *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (SNTS).<sup>99</sup> The papers of the first four conferences have already been published and set the premises for a more considerable treatment of the patristic-biblical approach.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, the first monograph on the reception of Luke and Acts in the period prior to Irenaeus is Andrew Gregory's extensive doctoral dissertation.<sup>101</sup> He examines the attestation of Luke's work before the first explicit witness (Irenaeus) and the sources prior to the Lukan composition.<sup>102</sup> He does not find any external evidence for the reception of Luke and Acts before the middle of the second century but concludes that this lack of evidence does not 'mean that these texts were not yet used, let alone not yet written'.<sup>103</sup> Further studies on the reception of Luke-Acts were published in Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett's *New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* series.<sup>104</sup>

Recently, Francis de Chaignon published a theological study, analysing the reception of the Ascension mystery in the liturgical tradition of the Christian Church. He surveys both the liturgical texts and creedal statements, and the biblical texts behind them. In the third part of his study he analyses some of the most important commentators, from the patristic writers to modern Catholic theologians who interpret the Ascension event (Irenaeus, Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine, Maxim the Confessor, John of Damascus, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Pierre de Bérulle, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger). The author's theological reflexion

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<sup>99</sup> The first conference (held in Neamț, Romania, 1998) addressed the matter of the interpretation of Scripture, linking the biblical text to the Patristic interpretation within the Church. The second conference (Rila Monastery, Bulgaria, 2001) discussed the impact of the Church Fathers' exegesis and the limits of the historical-critical method of interpretation. The unity of the Church in the New Testament was the theme of the third conference (Saint Petersburg, Russia, 2005), examining the ecclesiology of Scripture and the Church's mission. The fourth (Sâmbăta de Sus, Romania, 2007) assessed the idea of Prayer in the New Testament by comparing the two traditions (Eastern and Western). The fifth conference of the series is expected to be held in Minsk (Belarus, 2-9 September 2010), concerning *Gospel Images of Jesus Christ in Church Tradition and in Biblical Scholarship*.

<sup>100</sup> DUNN; KLEIN; LUZ; MIHOC (eds.), *Auslegung der Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Perspektive* (2000); DIMITROV; DUNN; LUZ; NIEBUHR (eds.), *Das Alte Testament als christliche Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Sicht* (2004); cf. the review by DOERING 2005: 157. ALEXEEV; KARAKOLIS; LUZ (eds.), *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament* (2008); KLEIN; MIHOC; NIEBUHR (eds.), *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament* (2009).

<sup>101</sup> *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus* (publ. 2003).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. the reviews by PAGET 2004: 742-744 and MARSHALL 2006: 121-124.

<sup>103</sup> GREGORY 2003: 353.

<sup>104</sup> GREGORY; TUCKETT (eds.), *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (2005) and *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (2005).



focuses on the Liturgy, Scripture and Tradition, emphasising the importance of the reception of the biblical text within the Church for its transmission and preservation.<sup>105</sup>

## 1.2 Proposed Methodology and Research Questions

Can the bodily Ascension of Christ be considered a historical narration or a real event? And also, how historically accurate is Lukan narration? What are the traditions and sources behind Luke's Ascension narratives? Why and in which way can we link Christ's Ascension to the ascension tradition of the Jewish literature in the Hellenistic-Roman period? Is the historical-critical method enough in examining the biblical texts in order to present an accurate understanding of the episode? How did the early Christian church interpret the Ascension?

All these questions were partially answered in the previous studies. However, none of those were meant to offer an inclusive view of the Ascension and its interpretation within the primary Church.

Mikeal C. Parsons considered that the historical-critical method, while recognising its value, implies some 'serious limitations with that approach in understanding and interpreting the biblical narratives'.<sup>106</sup> He combined both the *diachronic* (text, form and source criticism) and *synchronic* (narrative criticism) analyses to set a foundation upon which a theological reading of the text as canonical scripture can be constructed. This is the approach I propose in this study.

First of all, following Zwiep's direction we shall explore the context of the rapture (ascension) stories within the wider Jewish literature, studying the parallels between Elisha-Elijah, among others, and Jesus. Following this, a translation, textual analysis (structure, syntactic, and semantic) and, using the Sleeman's 'thirdspatiality' approach,

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<sup>105</sup> 'La liturgie procure au croyant un accès vivant aux mystères du Christ. En célébrant un mystère particulier, elle le relie à l'ensemble des mystères et surtout à leur sommet, le mystère pascal. L'étude liturgique d'un mystère du Christ oblige à prendre en compte ce caractère situé. Elle rend attentif à ses effets dans le croyant. Elle permet la saisie vitale du rapport entre Écriture et Tradition : la célébration est un acte de Tradition qui assume dans son écoute de l'Écriture deux millénaires de réception, d'assimilation, de traduction vivante et d'annonce du mystère du Christ. Ces trois dimensions vécues dans la célébration seront théologiquement reprises et explicitées, formant les trois parties de cette étude.' CHAIGNON 2008: 6.

<sup>106</sup> PARSONS 1987: 18.

an interpretation of the texts (Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11) will be proposed in the subsequent chapter. Furthermore, a comparison between the two Ascension narratives will conclude the third section. In the fourth chapter of the survey the reception and interpretation of the Ascension in the context of ancient Christianity will be examined (New Testament apocryphal writings and early Patristic writings). The reception and interpretation of the Ascension within early Christian thought are relevant for the discussion on *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the importance and impact the event itself received, as presented by Luke.<sup>107</sup> Finally, some finishing remarks and conclusions of my investigation will be made in the last chapter. I considered it relevant to include two *excursuses*: one on the Jewish Hekhalot literature and Merkabah mysticism with special emphasis on 3 Enoch, and another one on Jesus' Ascension accounts or allusions in the Gospels according to Mark (16:19) and John (20:17).

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<sup>107</sup> Although serious attempts were made in this direction (cf. GREGORY & TUCKETT) the subject of the reception and interpretation of the Ascension in Luke-Acts in the period before the fourth century remains insufficiently explored.

## CHAPTER 2: RAPTURE ACCOUNTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ANCIENT JUDAISM

### 2.1 Old Testament (including additional composition in the LXX)

#### 2.1.1 Elijah and Elisha in 1-2 Kings

Of all the prophets Elijah is the only one of whom is written that he ascended into heaven. As Fritz affirms, ‘even Moses, the greatest of the prophets so far, had to die in the land of Moab, although he was buried by God himself and his grave remained unknown (Deut 34:5-6).’<sup>108</sup> Apart from Elijah, only of Enoch (Gen 5:21-24) is it written that he was taken into heaven by God and gained immortality.<sup>109</sup>

Examining the books of 1 and 2 Kings, Thomas L. Brodie affirms that ‘the Elijah-Elisha narrative consists of 1Kgs 16:29-2Kgs 13:25’ and defends the unity of the two prophets’ lives and work narratives.<sup>110</sup> The account of the succession of Elisha and the ascension of Elijah we find in 2Kgs 2:1-18.<sup>111</sup> The story recounts the last event in Elijah’s life, his translation, and the announcement of his successor, Elisha. ‘By pronouncing Elisha, his specifically appointed disciple (1Kgs 19:19-21), as his successor, Elijah passes on his own spirit and authority to the new prophet.’<sup>112</sup> The passage of 2Kgs 2:11-12 implies a supernatural carrying of the prophet, an ascension story:

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, ‘Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> FRITZ 2003: 235.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. OSWALD 1982: 502-504; BERGER 1976: 42-52.

<sup>110</sup> BRODIE 2000: 1-12.

<sup>111</sup> The book of 2 Kings, originally joined with 1 Kings as a single work, is a composite writing which tells the story of Israel and Judah between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. The division of the two books was introduced by the translators of LXX (in which 2 Kings becomes 4 Reigns), and was subsequently adopted by Jerome in *Vulgate* and by most modern translators. In the Eastern Orthodox Bible, where the Old Testament translations are based mostly upon the LXX, the book is designated as 4 Kings (Βασιλειῶν Δ'). The book of 2 Kings opens with the conclusion of the Prophet Elijah’s mission, during the short reign of King Ahaziah of Israel (9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.).

<sup>112</sup> FRITZ 2003: 234.

<sup>113</sup> 2Kgs 2:11-12, in COOGAN (*NRSV*) 2007: 536.

The text alludes that Elijah's ascension is in fact a temporary movement, and not a final one. 'Because the narrative includes no reference to Elijah's death, he is portrayed in the later tradition as an eternal figure, who will return at the time of *the day of YHWH* (Mal. 3:23-24).'<sup>114</sup> The belief that prophets were taken and carried by God towards different places (e.g. the prophet Habakkuk in Bel 1:33) gave birth to the interpretation that Elijah, as well as other prophets, continued his life somewhere else and died there. 'It might be mentioned that there seems to have been a popular belief that God lifted up the prophets from one place, and carried them to another as the occasion demanded.'<sup>115</sup> Although the *chariots of fire and horses of fire* are mentioned here for the first time, they will appear again in the later Elisha stories. The chariot symbol had many interpretations for Israelites.<sup>116</sup> One of the meanings is based on the considerable role played by the chariots 'in the fortunes of the Israelite tribes in the early days of their settlement in Canaan. The Canaanites had then possessed chariots and this had given them weapon superiority over the Israelites... Thus chariots came to be for Israel the symbol of overwhelming military force'<sup>117</sup> and, therefore, chariots served a function of defending the nation. Elisha and Elijah's association with the chariot points towards their function as defenders of the nation against its enemies.<sup>118</sup> The symbol of the chariot and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* originated the later Merkabah mysticism of the Hekhalot literature.

Moses, who goes on Mount Horeb (Sinai) for forty days and nights, and receives the revelation from God himself (1Kgs 19:8), is presented in typology with Elijah.<sup>119</sup> Elijah

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<sup>114</sup> SWEENEY 2007: 274.

<sup>115</sup> BRONNER 1968: 126. This idea is suggested in verse 16 where the prophets request Elisha to let them send their fifty servants and search for the master. Elisha refuses this because of his strong conviction that Elijah was taken in heaven by God, and not 'upon some mountain, or into some valley' (2Kgs 2:16).

<sup>116</sup> Initially, the chariot was a symbol of the sun god of the Canaanites. In Jewish tradition it appears in relation to YHWH and His angels. 'Here the image of chariots seems to be used to evoke the idea of the power of Yahweh. The solar myth was probably in the mind of the writer as a means of visualising Elijah's passage to heaven. In other passages it is impossible to say whether its source is human chariotry or divine chariots.' ROBINSON 1976: 26.

<sup>117</sup> ROBINSON 1976: 26.

<sup>118</sup> 'Bei JHWH's Wolkenwagen ist an einen furchterweckenden Streitwagen zu denken, womit JHWH seine Feinde überfällt. JHWH's fahren durch den Himmel ist ein Erweis, daß er dort Herr und Meister ist; der ganze Himmel ist seine Domäne; von dort kann er über die Welt herrschen und den Seinen zu Hilfe kommen.' HOUTMAN 1993: 326; cf. also: BERGEN 1999: 63: 'The sudden appearance of the military images of horses and chariots reminds readers that this is not only a story about prophets and their relationship to each other. Elijah was and Elisha is expected to be a major player in the political and military life of Israel.'

<sup>119</sup> Cf. HERR 1997: 230.

is also found as the prefigurement of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. As Richard Hess suggests, ‘it is this ministry of life that forms the closest living model of Jesus’ life and work in the New Testament. Again and again the miracles that Jesus performs are anticipated by prophets’ works in the books of Kings.’<sup>120</sup> The parallels between the departure story of Elijah in 2 Kings and the Ascension of Jesus in Luke-Acts are evident: after an introduction (v. 1) the two prophets travel together towards Jordan, where Elijah divides the water<sup>121</sup> (vv. 2-8). Following the promise of sending ‘a double sharing of Elijah’s spirit’ (vv. 9-10), the prophet departs in a whirlwind, ascending into heaven (v. 11). Elisha, remaining alone and witnessing the departure, cries and rends Elijah’s garments as a symbol of the final separation (v. 12). He returns and performs the same miracle as his master, dividing the river Jordan, and receives the recognition as the rightful successor of the ascended one (vv. 13-15). Markus Öhler demonstrated that Luke used the Elijah material in composing Jesus’ Ascension story, and thus the common terminology and motives in Luke-Acts can be explained.<sup>122</sup>

Although the thought of the ascension is introduced by the author in the first verse of the passage (2Kgs 2:1), the event itself is presented in the eleventh. The translation of the prophet Elijah is reported twice in the verse 11, the first time only alluded to (11a). He is not presented to be dead or buried, but ascended to heaven. The chiasmic structure of the passage is centred on verse 11. ‘Elijah’s ascension marks the conclusion of his earthly career and is *conditio sine qua non* for the transfer of his spirit to Elisha, the fulfilment of which is closely related to Elisha’s seeing Elijah go to heaven.’<sup>123</sup> Elijah’s ascension is seen as the reward for his virtuous life and his zeal for the law.<sup>124</sup>

Fretheim sees as the central theme of the narrative the transfer of the prophetic spirit from Elijah to Elisha, rather than the ascension of the prophet.<sup>125</sup> The ascension of Elijah is witnessed by his successor Elisha, on whose life and work the book of 2 Kings will focus from this moment on.<sup>126</sup> Elisha’s sorrowful cry represents the climax of the

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<sup>120</sup> HESS 2008: 122.

<sup>121</sup> Here we can distinguish the initiating journey of Elisha, in comparison with the exodus out of Egypt of the Israelites (Exod 13), under the command of Moses who divided the waters (Exod 14:21). For the comparison between the two figures (Moses and Elijah), see: ÖHLER 1997: 122-127.

<sup>122</sup> ÖHLER, *Elia im Neuen Testament*, pp. 203-215.

<sup>123</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 59.

<sup>124</sup> 1Macc 2:58 states that ‘Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven’.

<sup>125</sup> FRETHEIM 1999: 136.

<sup>126</sup> BERGEN 1999: 55.

entire chapter and, in Hobbs' opinion, its form of lament was adopted by Luke (Lk 13:34).<sup>127</sup> Elisha is presented in comparison with Elijah as the image of the normal rhythm of life. After the departure of his master, Elisha becomes a full prophet like Elijah, 'but then just after he reaches this high point, small signs emerge of advancing years: he is *bald* (2Kgs 2:23); he *breaks his journey to eat* and, later, to eat *and rest* (2Kgs 4:8-10); he *has a house* of his own, in which he stays (2Kgs 5:9-10) and to which he is later accompanied by *the elders* (2Kgs 6:32).'<sup>128</sup> His death and burial are depicted in 2Kgs 13:20-21 and even his bones continued to perform wonders, an argument of his powers as a great prophet. Furthermore, Sweeney observes that 'the resurrection motif is characteristic of the Elijah and Elisha traditions in 1Kgs 17:17-24 and 2Kgs 4:8-37'.<sup>129</sup> Elijah's ministry on earth is continued by Elisha, and this is the reason why the two prophets cannot be examined separately. As Fretheim states, 'in some inexplicable way, Elijah lives on in the ministry of Elisha; Elisha is Elijah one more time, larger than life'.<sup>130</sup> Scott Hill rejects the idea that Elijah and Elisha journeyed together and even declares that they probably never met.<sup>131</sup> However, his arguments are not convincing and the fact that Elisha inherited Elijah's literary legacy (oral and written) cannot be contested.<sup>132</sup>

The tradition of Elijah's ascension to heaven in a chariot of fire was preserved and developed in Jewish literature. The Christian authors used the Elijah-Elisha tradition and interpreted it as the prefiguration of Jesus' Ascension and the beginning of the apostolic mission.<sup>133</sup> Two other Jewish texts containing Elijah's rapture narratives are analysed in this chapter (Sir 48:9-12 and Lives of the Prophets 21:15), with the purpose of comparing and examining the different accounts of the same tradition.

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<sup>127</sup> The expression 'Father! father!' is interpreted as being both an address of respect (and maybe as the title of the leader of the prophetic group), and as a manifestation of sorrow at the departure of the master. HOBBS 1985: 22.

<sup>128</sup> BRODIE 2000: 7.

<sup>129</sup> SWEENEY 2007: 360.

<sup>130</sup> FRETHEIM 1999: 140.

<sup>131</sup> HILL 1992: 69: 'I find it likely that Elijah and Elisha never met. If Elijah had lived to see Ahab's death at Ramoth-Gilead, would this not have been noted somehow in the text? Elisha was a player in regional politics who somehow became connected with the cult of Elijah – by an individual, grassroots, or institutional move. The connection could have originated with the Deuteronomistic historian, but I doubt it; it goes back at least to the Jehuid historian.'

<sup>132</sup> RENTERÍA 1992: 119-120.

<sup>133</sup> For a comprehensive survey concerning the usage and interpretation of the Elijah-Elisha story in the ancient Christian literature, see: POIROT 1997.

### 2.1.2 Elijah in Sirach 48:9-12

The book of Sirach<sup>134</sup> is a Jewish work from the early second century B.C., included in the LXX as a canonical book.<sup>135</sup> Originally written in Hebrew by Ben Sira, probably in Alexandria, it is a collection of ethical teachings.<sup>136</sup> Several allusions to Sirach can be found in the New Testament (of which the most relevant for our study being the blessing of Simon the High Priest, 50:20-21, found in the ascension narrative of Lk 24:50). Interpreting the prophecy from Mal 4:5-6 the author makes an eschatological reference to Elijah, based on the ascension narrative in 2Kgs 2:11-12:<sup>137</sup>

You were taken up by a whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with horses of fire. At the appointed time, it is written, you are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. Happy are those who saw you and were adorned with your love! For we also shall surely live. When Elijah was enveloped in the whirlwind, Elisha was filled with his spirit. He performed twice as many signs, and marvels with every utterance of his mouth. Never in his lifetime did he tremble before any ruler, nor could anyone intimidate him at all.<sup>138</sup>

After reporting on both Elijah's miraculous and political accomplishments (48:3-9), the narration 'turns to the eschatological deeds which Elijah was expected to perform',<sup>139</sup> (48:10). Ben Sira mentions the two people in the Old Testament who were taken up into heaven while still alive, Enoch (44:16) and Elijah, and expresses the expectation of the Prophet Elijah's return.<sup>140</sup> Elijah is assumed into heaven not only for his merits but especially to fulfil a special mission at the end of times.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, Elijah's successor, Elisha, is mentioned as receiving the spirit of his master and the power of prophecy, and to perform wonders. The only reference regarding the resurrection of the dead is found

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<sup>134</sup> Also known as *Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach*, the *Wisdom* (or *Proverbs*) of *Ben Sira*, and *Ecclesiasticus*.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. WISCHMEYER 1995: 2-7.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. SAUER 2000: 26-35.

<sup>137</sup> 'In the Mishnah this verse from Malachi was interpreted as restoring *the tribes of Jacob*, i.e. gathering together refugees and exiles: *Elijah will not come to declare unclean or clean, to remove far or to bring nigh, but to remove afar those (families) that were brought nigh by violence and to bring nigh those (families) that were removed afar by violence* (Eduyoth 8:7).' SNAITH 1974: 240.

<sup>138</sup> Sir 48:9-12, in COOGAN (NRSV) 2007: 169-170.

<sup>139</sup> LEE 1986: 211.

<sup>140</sup> CORLEY 2008: 180.

<sup>141</sup> 'Ainsi se trouve précisé le motif de cet enlèvement au ciel, non seulement les mérites de sa vie, mais, sur la base de ces mérites, une mission à accomplir aux derniers temps. C'est ainsi que la littérature apocalyptique peut s'emparer de l'épisode pour expliciter la mission finale du prophète. Et nous établirons plus loin un parallèle entre le récit du deuxième livre des Rois et le récit de l'Ascension au début des *Actes*, la réminiscence de la figure d'Élie constituant une clé de compréhension supplémentaire de l'événement.' CHAIGNON 2008: 54.

in the description of Elijah.<sup>142</sup> Sauer regards as a later interpolation in the text the eschatological expectation of Elijah's return.<sup>143</sup> Based on the account from 2 Kings, Edward Wright observed that 'while ascent to heaven was not a central tenet of the biblical religious imagination, the ascent motif became prominent in many Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures during the course of the Greco-Roman period.'<sup>144</sup>

### 2.1.3 Enoch in Genesis 5

Enoch of Seth's line is the first figure in the Old Testament who was taken by God into heaven, and the only one mentioned in the Generations to 'walk with God'. He is described as the father of Methuselah in the short account in the book of Genesis, and also as the seventh from Adam. 'In biblical genealogies the seventh member is often specially favoured, and Enoch, the seventh from Adam conforms to this pattern.'<sup>145</sup>

When Enoch had lived for sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah for three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.<sup>146</sup>

The text describes Enoch as having a direct connection with God. The place and/or time of the ascension are not mentioned, and nor is the reason.<sup>147</sup> Wenham argues that these particular details are also meant to distinguish Enoch from Cain's son, also called Enoch (Gen 4:17). This early tradition developed in the three pseudepigraphical books of Enoch.<sup>148</sup> The rabbinic readings of the passage consider Enoch to be a pious man taken away by God before he would become corrupted, and that he did not die.<sup>149</sup> The similarities of the Enoch traditions to the ascension of Elijah in Sirach are clear, as seen within the apocalyptic literature. The Fathers of the Church interpreted this episode as

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<sup>142</sup> MULDER 2003: 325-326.

<sup>143</sup> SAUER 2000: 327.

<sup>144</sup> WRIGHT 2004: 130.

<sup>145</sup> WENHAM 1987: 127.

<sup>146</sup> Gen 5:21-24, in COOGAN (NRSV) 2007: 18.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. CHAIGNON 2008: 52.

<sup>148</sup> 'Die Wendung meinte in der alten Tradition, dass Henoch mit Gott in einer direkten, unmittelbaren Verbindung stand und so auch mit Gottes Pläne und Absichten vertraut war. Dies ist der Ansatzpunkt für die Bedeutung, die die Gestalt Henoch in einer schon früh einsetzenden, aber erst in der apokalyptischen Literatur zutage kommenden Tradition bekam.' WESTERMANN 1974: 485.

<sup>149</sup> The book of Jubilees (4:23) develops a biography of Enoch and depicts him, through the angel's discourse, as judging the children of men in heaven. For an expanded discussion on the Jewish view of Enoch, see the subsequent subchapter on the Books of 1, 2 Enoch and Jubilees.



a work of the Holy Spirit,<sup>150</sup> or as a demonstration that the physical body does not prevent humans from becoming saints.<sup>151</sup> Tertullian affirmed the temporary status of Enoch's life without death, saying that 'Enoch and Elijah were transported hence without suffering death, which was only postponed. The day will come when they will actually die that they may extinguish Antichrist with their blood.'<sup>152</sup> Sometimes, Enoch's disappearance from the earthly scene is read as a poetic euphemism for death, expressing that Enoch did not experience a normal death.<sup>153</sup> 'Although it [the text of Gen 5:21-24] does not explicitly say that Enoch did not die there is great unanimity among the interpreters up to the period pertinent to our investigation (first century A.D.) that Enoch did escape death and was bodily transferred from human society into the divine realm.'<sup>154</sup>

The Targum Onkelos on Gen 5:24 reads that Enoch had in fact died: 'And Enoch walked in (the) fear of the Lord; the he was no more, for the Lord had caused him to die.'<sup>155</sup> Nonetheless, some other TO versions read: 'The Lord did *not* cause him to die', sustained by the Derek 'Erez Zuṭa 1.18. However, Bernard Grossfeld emphasised the general rabbinic view that Enoch had in fact died (confirmed by Bereshit Rabba 24.1).<sup>156</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Psalm 110 (109 LXX)

This psalm is relevant in our discussion on the ascension narratives because of its interpretation concerning the heavenly enthronement of Jesus.<sup>157</sup> The first verse of Psalm 110 was often interpreted by the Christian writers as a clear allusion to the

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<sup>150</sup> On the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, AMBROSE (LOUTH 2001: 119) commented: 'Good are the wings of love, the true wings that flew about through the mouths of the apostles, and the wings of fire that spoke the pure word. On these wings Enoch flew when he was snatched up to heaven'.

<sup>151</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on John* 75 (in LOUTH 2001: 120): 'The nature of the flesh did not prevent Paul, for instance, from becoming such a saint as he became or Peter from receiving the keys of heaven. Further, Enoch, though possessed of the flesh, was taken by God and seen no more.'

<sup>152</sup> Tertullian, *On the Soul* 50.5, in LOUTH 2001: 121.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. WENHAM 1987: 128; WESTERMANN 1974: 486; MOBERLY 2009: 75.

<sup>154</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 41.

<sup>155</sup> ABERBACH; GROSSFELD 1982: 48-49.

<sup>156</sup> 'The Targum emphasizes Enoch's death in an attempt to counter the sectarian tendency to glorify Enoch who was said to have been translated to heaven alive and to have been transformed into an angel. The anti-sectarian Rabbinic attitude reduced Enoch to more human proportions, with human failings, alleging that he had died before his time because his righteousness was not expected to endure; cf. Gen. Rab. XXV:1, p. 238f.' GROSSFELD 1988: 51.

<sup>157</sup> HENGEL 1995.1: 119-225.

glorification of Christ and his sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven.<sup>158</sup> There is no general agreement concerning the date of the Psalm<sup>159</sup> and, based on the cultic elements and vocabulary, Hellen Jefferson demonstrates its Canaanite background.<sup>160</sup> This short psalm was classified by John W. Hilber as ‘cultic enthronement prophecy with compositional unity dating to the monarchic period.’<sup>161</sup>

The Lord says to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’<sup>162</sup>

The phrase is quoted or alluded to 23 times through the New Testament, thus proving the importance it received as a messianic prophecy in the apostolic age.<sup>163</sup> The original sense of the verse ‘was evidently that a particular Israelite monarch reigned with the power and authority of Yahweh himself. Possibly it alludes to the physical situation of the king’s throne to the right (or south) of Solomon’s temple, where God was believed to be enthroned.’<sup>164</sup> The passage was interpreted in the late rabbinic texts to the whole of Israel, and sometimes linked to the messianic expectation.<sup>165</sup>

Another messianic prophecy was seen in verse 4, as an argument for the priesthood of Jesus. Ancient kings, including the Israelite kings, sometimes performed priestly duties, a function that Christ as God and Messiah would hold as well. It was interpreted by the early Christians that the psalm affirms the glory of Christ and that the Church lives by

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<sup>158</sup> HENGEL 1991: 43-73; HAHN 1963: 126-132.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Psalm 110 is necessarily ascribed either to a very early or to a quite late period in the growth of the Psalter. The picture of the warrior-priest who will smite his enemies by the power of Yahweh can be connected either with the early days when the Kings of Israel still combined military and religious functions, or with the much later time when the ruling high-priests of the Maccabean line were engaged in warlike pursuits.’ HARDY 1945: 385. Th. BOOIJ (1991: 406) argues that the Psalm can be dated before the exile, based on the priest mentioned in v. 4.

<sup>160</sup> JEFFERSON 1954: 152-156.

<sup>161</sup> HILBER 2003: 366.

<sup>162</sup> Ps. 110 (109):1, in COOGAN (NRSV) 2007: 874. GERLEMAN (1981: 17-18) argued with poor arguments that the ‘right hand’ should be translated as the ‘south land’ and that it refers strictly to the Judean territory.

<sup>163</sup> In Luke-Acts we find the mention or allusion to Ps. 110:1 six times: Lk 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:33; 2:34-35; 5:31; 7:55-56. Seven more times it can be traced within early Christian writings: 1 Clem. 36:5; Pol *Phil* 2:1; Barn. 12:10; Apoc. Pet. 6; Sib. Or. 2:243; Apr. Jas. 14:30 f; Heg. (EH) 2.23.13. For a complete list, see: *loci citati vel allegati*, in NA<sup>27</sup>: 789.

<sup>164</sup> HAY 1973: 20.

<sup>165</sup> ‘In sum, rabbinic exegetes often interpreted Ps. 110 messianically, and that custom was probably established among Jews of Jesus’ time. The rabbis were inclined to develop this line of exegesis with visions of a messiah whose work and victories were earthly.’ HAY 1973: 33.

the power and guidance of the exalted Christ.<sup>166</sup> ‘In Luke-Acts, for example, Jesus’ heavenly position appears to be understood both in a quasi-spatial sense and in terms of a lack of ongoing communication. The ascended Jesus is no longer on earth; he remains in heaven during the period before the parousia.’<sup>167</sup>

## 2.2 Jewish Writings from the Hellenistic-Roman Period

In the subsequent section of the present study an analysis of the documents containing different ascension traditions will be made in order to establish their impact and reception in the Hellenistic-Roman framework. The following analysed texts belong to the Jewish apocryphal writings written in the first and second century and reflect the ascension-rapture traditions of the Old Testament period. Their relevance for this study resides in their use within the early Christian Church, interpreted as prefigurations of the Ascension of Jesus. It is important to explore the context in which the author of Luke and Acts assembled the Ascension narrative within the first-century Judaic framework.

### 2.2.1 The Lives of the Prophets

The content of this apocryphon might be summarised as the Codex Marchalianus did: ‘The names of the prophets, and where they are from, and where they died and how, and where they lie’.<sup>168</sup> The book, also known as *Vitae Prophetarum*, represents a summary of short biographies of the Old Testament prophets. The collection treats the four major and twelve minor prophets, along with seven other prophets from the historical books. The book is extant in Greek manuscripts and other dependent translations (of which are Syriac, Ethiopic, Latin and Armenian).<sup>169</sup> Although some scholars proposed Syriac as the original language of composition, the majority believe that the Greek translation was

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<sup>166</sup> ‘Although the exaltation imagery of Ps. 110 easily lends itself to a symbolic-figurative explanation in terms of divine appointment to a position of honour and dignity without the notion of an ascent to heaven – after all, Ps. 110 was addressed to an early king at his ascension to an earthly throne! – it seems that from the very beginning of Christological reflection the belief that Jesus was ‘exalted at the right hand of God’ has had an overtly spatial overtone, implying a geographical transfer from earth to heaven (that is, exaltation *at* the right hand of God carried with the thought of exaltation *to* the right hand of God).’ ZWIEP 1997: 126.

<sup>167</sup> HAY 1973: 101.

<sup>168</sup> HARE, *OTP* 2 1985: 379. For other titles of the book found in other MSS, see: SCHWEMER 1996.2: 3\*.

<sup>169</sup> For a comprehensive list of extant MSS and recensions, see: SCHWEMER 1997: 540-543; SCHWEMER 1995: 12-22.

made after a Semitic language version.<sup>170</sup> Dated to the first half of the first century A.D., the work survives only in Christian manuscripts.<sup>171</sup> Even though it is considered by the majority of scholars to be of Jewish origin (composed in Palestine<sup>172</sup>), David Satran, by comparing the Lives of the Prophets with the *vita* of Daniel, argues that *Vitae Prophetarum* must be regarded as a Christian document.<sup>173</sup> Ana Maria Schwemer contradicted Satran and regarded his arguments as inconsistent.<sup>174</sup>

In the Life of Elijah the Thesbite (21:1-15) a very short account of his departure is found in the last verse. The text states that ‘finally he was taken up in a chariot of fire’<sup>175</sup> (21:15). Based on the rapture story from 2 Kings 2:11 and Sirach 48:9 the short description of Elijah’s ascension in a chariot of fire shows that this tradition appears to be a well-known fact in the Lives of the Prophets.<sup>176</sup>

### 2.2.2 Fourth Ezra (Chapters 3-14 of 2 Esdras)

Fourth Ezra<sup>177</sup> is an apocalyptic writing, and although it was written in the first century<sup>178</sup> by a Jew, was transmitted down through the centuries within the Christian

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<sup>170</sup> MITTMANN-RICHERT 2000: 157.

<sup>171</sup> The current text (the ‘anonymous recension’) reveals several Christian additions of little importance for our study. Cf. BERNHEIMER 1935: 200-203.

<sup>172</sup> TORREY (1946: 11) argues that the writing is likely to be composed in Jerusalem, because of the accurate and detailed information the author gives regarding the city.

<sup>173</sup> In SATRAN’s (1995: 119-120) view, although the work is based on several earlier Jewish traditions, it remains, nevertheless, an extensively edited text of a Christian authorship. ‘One must read all such materials which have passed through the filter of non-Jewish transmission with a heightened sensitivity to their more subtle reflections of Christian thought or practice. It may often be no more than an aberrant phrase or a lexical incongruity that alerts us to the possibility of an unsuspected significance, in turn demanding a correspondingly altered historical and religious context... The very act of redaction is equally an act of “composition”, i.e. the creation of a new literary entity with a meaning and function proper to its historical framework... The encounter with the text leaves us with the paradox that a work which appears most indubitably Jewish can, in fact, be most deeply Christian.’

<sup>174</sup> SCHWEMER 1995: 371: ‘Die Daniel-Vita ist in ihrem Ursprung kein Zeugnis byzantinischer Frömmigkeit, wie es SATRAN nicht müde wird zu wiederholen, sondern der hellenistisch-jüdischen Frömmigkeit, die in diesem Fall – wie es auch sonst so oft zu beobachten ist – deren Vorgängerin ist.’

<sup>175</sup> HARE, *OTP* 2: 397.

<sup>176</sup> ‘Bei Elia tritt and die Stelle der Todes- und Grabesnotiz natürlich – dem Schrifttext entsprechend – die Angabe von seiner Entrückung. Sowohl im alten Orient wie in der hellenistisch-römischer Zeit war die Entrückung in die himmlische Welt ein oft literarisch und ikonographisch ausgestaltetes Thema.’ SCHWEMER 1996: 226-227.

<sup>177</sup> The book is identified in the Latin Vulgate as *Esdrae liber IV*, and as a part of an expanded book entitled 2 Esdras. Chapters 1-2, 15-16 are considered later Christian additions, designated as 5 and, respectively, 6 Ezra. 4 Ezra thus refers to this central portion of 2 Esdras. Cf. METZGER 1957: 21-22; METZGER, *OTP* 1 1983: 516-517.

Church.<sup>179</sup> It is generally held that the original text was composed in Hebrew, even though the Hebrew version has not survived. In the late second century Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 3:16) quotes Fourth Ezra in Greek, this suggesting that the Greek translation was probably made in the second century. From the Greek version, which has not survived either, come other translations, the writing being known only in Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Georgian, Armenian, Arabic translations, and a fragment in Coptic.<sup>180</sup>

The writing (4Ezra 3-14) contains seven episodes, or visions in which Angel Uriel is depicted in dialogue with Ezra, the biblical priest and scribe. In the second episode (4Ezra 5:21-6:34) Ezra's speech emphasises on the election of Israel by the Lord's grace, including a prediction of redemption and a reference to the people who were translated to heaven<sup>181</sup> (6:25-26):

And it shall come to pass that whoever remains after all that I have foretold to you shall himself be saved and shall see my salvation and the end of my world. And they shall see the men who were taken up, who from their birth have not tasted death; and the heart of the earth's inhabitants shall be changed and converted to a different spirit.<sup>182</sup>

Verse 26 'predicts that those who were assumed to heaven without dying will appear and that the hearts of the inhabitants of the earth will be changed to a different spirit'<sup>183</sup>. The text probably refers to Enoch and Elijah, although their names are not explicitly mentioned. 'In context it is clear that at least Enoch and Elijah are being referred to. In later Jewish and Christian sources Elijah and Enoch became steady companions in the eschatological course of events.'<sup>184</sup> In the epilogue of the book (the seventh vision, 14:7-9) Ezra becomes a new Moses figure, invested by God with the mission to carry out his task (giving of the law).

And now I say to you: Lay up in your heart the signs that I have seen, and the interpretation that you have heard; for you shall be taken up from among men, and

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<sup>178</sup> STONE (1991: 358-360) demonstrated that the original composition was written soon after the destruction of the Second Temple (about A.D. 100).

<sup>179</sup> LONGENECKER 1995: 17.

<sup>180</sup> It is generally accepted that the Latin translation is the most reliable. Cf. LONGENECKER 1995: 18; LICHTENBERGER 1974-2003: 292.

<sup>181</sup> Uriel mentions the existence of others who were 'taken up' alive to heaven, such as Enoch, Elijah, and associates them with the Messiah - Son of God. Cf. HOGAN 2008: 207-218.

<sup>182</sup> 4 Ezra 6:25-26. Translated by STONE 1990: 163.

<sup>183</sup> STONE 1990: 172.

<sup>184</sup> ZWIEP 2001: 339.

henceforth you shall be my servant and with those who are like you, until the times are ended.<sup>185</sup>

This allusion to the Messiah,<sup>186</sup> as the Son of God, is probably based on the *Ebed Yahweh* portrait (the Servant of God) of Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>187</sup> This prediction about Ezra's personal faith (14:9), his assumption alive to heaven is affirming that 'there he will be preserved with the Messiah ("my servant") and the righteous until the end of times. In 4 Ezra there are a number of references to humans who were taken up to heaven alive, an idea that is related to an overall evaluation of life and death'<sup>188</sup>. The text seems to imply Ezra's return to earth for completing his eschatological task in the endtime, especially if compared with the Enoch and Elijah ascension narratives. In 4Ezra 14:9, the priest is said to become a servant of God and 'those who are like you' might refer to 'choice persons like Enoch and Elijah.'<sup>189</sup> Nonetheless, in 14:23, 36, 42, 44-45 a period of forty days is mentioned, in which he must instruct five men 'to ensure his secret wisdom will not be lost to later generations'.<sup>190</sup>

These two accounts of ascensions represent a vivid image of the strong tradition of assumption stories in the post-Temple apocalyptic writings. In the context of the apocalyptic writings, and 'given the prominence of apocalyptic traditions about Enoch, it must have been only a matter of time before other (more prominent and less controversial) historical figures were claimed to have received heavenly revelations and were believed to have been granted the privilege of being bodily taken up to heaven. It is likely that Ezra's activity as priest and scribe made him an eligible candidate for apocalyptic speculations.'<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> 4 Ezra 14:7-9. Translated by STONE 1990: 414.

<sup>186</sup> STONE 2006: 335-336.

<sup>187</sup> LONGENECKER 1995: 78-79. For a detailed commentary on the Messiah as the Son of God in 4 Ezra see: STONE 1989: 71-75.

<sup>188</sup> STONE 1990: 420-421. He suggests that this prophecy is probably part of a divine speech found in 4 Ezra 14:3-18.

<sup>189</sup> MYERS 1974: 322.

<sup>190</sup> ZWIEP 2001: 340.

<sup>191</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 72.

### 2.2.3 The First Book of Enoch

The Book of Enoch (or 1 Enoch) is the oldest of the three Pseudepigrapha attributed to Enoch, son of Jared (Gen 5:18). The depiction of Enoch in Gen 5:22-24<sup>192</sup> gave rise to a tradition that affirms his ascension and that he saw ‘the mysteries of the universe, the future of the world, and the predetermined course of human history.’<sup>193</sup>

1 Enoch represents a composite work, an anthology of five different writings and two short appendices, composed by an unknown number of authors. The complete version of 1 Enoch is extant only in Ethiopic (Ge’ez), but fragments are found in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin.<sup>194</sup> After the discovery of the Aramaic fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran Cave 4, in 1952), Milik categorised the Ethiopic *Vorlage* into five primary books and a later addition (the last chapter, 1En 108).<sup>195</sup> Originally composed between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D., the Book of Enoch ‘originated in Judaea and was in use at Qumran before the beginning of the Christian period’.<sup>196</sup>

In the *Book of the Watchers* two journeys which Enoch had are described. Enoch’s first journey through the Earth and Sheol is presented in 1En 17-19, where he is taken by angels and receives visions regarding the punishment for the fallen angels.<sup>197</sup> As Paula R. Gooder observes, ‘both journeys involve the revelation of the secrets of the world, particularly the future abodes for the fallen Watchers (17-19; 21), and the souls of the dead (22), the fire which was the luminaries of heaven (23); the seven mountains and the tree of life which is Jerusalem (24-26).’<sup>198</sup> In the *Book of Similitudes* (or Parables) the final translation to heaven of Enoch is presented in relation to Elijah’s ascension<sup>199</sup> and as the Son of Man (a prefigurement of the Messiah).<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> ‘Auch Henochs Himmelfahrt dürfte ein Midrash zu Gen. 5:22-23 („Und Henoch wanderte mit Gott“, d.h. mit *Elohim*) sein, wenn man mit einigen antiken jüdischen Autoren für die Elohim die Engel liest, die Henoch auf seiner Himmelfahrt begleiten.’ OEGEMA 2001: 145.

<sup>193</sup> ISAAC, *OTP* 1: 5.

<sup>194</sup> For a comprehensive list of the MSS and the different versions, see: KNIBB 1978: 1-46.

<sup>195</sup> According to MILIK (1976: 4-88), the book consists of five fragments: The Book of the Watchers (chs. 1-36), The Book of the Similitudes (chs. 37-71), The Book of Astronomical Writings (chs. 72-82), The Book of Dream Visions (chs. 83-90), The Book of the Epistle of Enoch (chs. 91-107).

<sup>196</sup> ISAAC, *OTP* 1: 7-8.

<sup>197</sup> *Watchers* is the designation given to the angels who came to earth and corrupted it (cf. 1En 17:1).

<sup>198</sup> GOODER 2006: 39.

<sup>199</sup> ‘Cf. 2Kgs 2:11: Elijah is transported in a *chariot of fire*, Enoch in a *chariot of spirit*.’ BLACK 1985: 250. Cf. CHAIGNON 2008: 56.

And it happened after this that his living name was raised up before that Son of Man and to the Lord from among those who dwell upon the earth; it was lifted up in a wind chariot and it disappeared from among them. From that day on, I was not counted among them. But he placed me between two winds, between the northeast and the west, where the angels took a cord to measure for me the place for the elect and righteous ones.<sup>201</sup>

Black argues that a later Christian scribe probably corrupted the text and interpreted the passage theologically. He suggests the variant ‘the name of a son of man’ instead of the text version used by Charles and Isaac.<sup>202</sup> The words ‘between two winds’ probably refers to two regions or two spirits. Another account, a detailed explanation about the means of Enoch’s rapture, is provided in 1En 71:1, where he sees the angels in white garments (cf. Dan 7:9; Mk 9:3; Acts 1:10) and their faces snow-white (cf. 2En 37).<sup>203</sup> ‘Enoch’s parables, the pictures of heaven which show us the truth about the earth, are described not only as parables, but also as a vision of wisdom.’<sup>204</sup> Interestingly, Enoch’s ascension is preceded by a period of instructions to his children of one year, as mentioned in 1En 81:6.<sup>205</sup> There is no doubt about the identity of the ascended one or that the tradition regarding Enoch’s ascent is based on the biblical account in Gen 5: ‘The one who ascends in the *Book of the Watchers* is the mythical figure of Enoch. The ascent is recounted in the first person, as a personal experience of Enoch himself. The background for Enoch is probably to be found in Gen 5:18-24, though he also appears elsewhere. Given the mysterious nature of the account of Enoch in Genesis it is not surprising that a tradition of ascent has been attached to him here in more detail.’<sup>206</sup>

The two most relevant accounts in 1 Enoch for the discussion on ascension are found in the second revelation of the *Book of Dream Visions* (1En 85:2-90:42).<sup>207</sup> The allegorical fable in this fragment ‘takes us from Adam, the white bull of 1En 85:3 down to the Maccabean wars (90:9-19). Significantly the events of Genesis 3 are completely

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. BEYERLE 2005: 146-148.

<sup>201</sup> 1En 70:1-3, in ISAAC, *OTP* 1: 49.

<sup>202</sup> BLACK 1985: 250.

<sup>203</sup> 1En 71:1 (ISAAC, *OTP* 1: 49): ‘(Thus) it happened after this that my spirit passed out of sight and ascended into the heavens. And I saw the sons of the holy angels walking upon the flame of fire; their garments were white – and their overcoats – and the light of their faces was like snow.’

<sup>204</sup> BARKER 2005: 75.

<sup>205</sup> Compare this aspect with the forty-day period of instruction before Jesus’ Ascension in Acts 1:3. ZWIEP (2001: 339) observes that ‘the actual rapture event is being preceded by a period of final instructions, almost as a *conditio sine qua non*.’

<sup>206</sup> GOODER 2006: 46.

<sup>207</sup> The Book of Dream Visions (1En. 83-90) consists of two revelations received by Enoch in his youth, before his marriage and the ‘walks with God’ (1En 83:1-2). The second vision, much longer than the first is sometimes called the *Animal Apocalypse*.



omitted'.<sup>208</sup> In a vision of four heavenly beings (1En 87:2-3) Enoch is once again taken by angels into heaven.

And I lifted my eyes unto heaven and I saw a vision: And behold, there came forth from heaven (a being) in the form of a snow-white person-one came out of that place and three (others) with him. Those ones which had come out last seized by my hand and took me from the generations of the earth, lifted me up into a high place, and showed me a high tower above the earth, and the hills were firm.<sup>209</sup>

The high place and tower signify the heavenly palace of God and his throne, where Enoch is brought by the angelic guides to see the flood.<sup>210</sup> The four archangels (probably Michael, Sariel or Uriel, Raphael and Gabriel) have human appearance, as humans have animal.<sup>211</sup> Their white clothing signifies purity and represents a symbol for angelic appearances (cf. Acts 1:10) and, perhaps, their status as heavenly priests.<sup>212</sup> The following events presented are accounts of the events contemporaneous to the author of the passage.<sup>213</sup> In the following narrative (1En 90:30-39) the author depicts Enoch's vision of the judgement day<sup>214</sup>:

Then I saw all the sheep that had survived as well as all the animals upon the earth and the birds of heaven falling down and worshipping those sheep, making petition to them and obeying them in every respect. Thereafter, those three who were wearing snow-white (clothes), the former ones who had caused me to go up, grabbed me by hand - also the hand of that ram holding me - and I ascended; they set me down in the midst of those sheep prior to the occurrence of this judgement. Those sheep were all snow-white, and their wool considerably clean.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> JACKSON 2004: 37; cf. also: MILIK 1976: 45. CHARLES (1912: 215) interpreted the white bull as the figure of the Messiah. Cf. REDDISH 1995: 43

<sup>209</sup> 1En. 87:2-3, in ISAAC, *OTP* 1: 63-64.

<sup>210</sup> 'The high tower in a high place from which Enoch will behold the destruction of the angels, giants and men (87:3-4) unites into a single place the first paradisiac abode of Enoch, the heavenly palace and the mountain throne of God.' MILIK 1976: 43; cf. also: DAVIDSON 1992: 96-110.

<sup>211</sup> 'As humans are represented by animals, the archangels are represented by humans. The reference is to the seven archangels who are named and their functions described at Ch. 20, a list belonging to the hellenistic period.' BLACK 1985: 260.

<sup>212</sup> NICKELSBURG 2001: 374.

<sup>213</sup> 'From the fourth epoch of the seventy periods, which begins towards the year 200 B.C. (En. 90:6 ff.), the writer recounts events which are contemporaneous with himself: the formation of the party of Hasidaeans (vv. 6-7), the murder of high priest Onias in the summer of 170 B.C. (v. 8), the exploits of the Maccabaeans, in particular of Judas, the ram with a large horn (v. 9).' BLACK 1985: 43-44; cf also, NICKELSBURG 2001: 374.

<sup>214</sup> 'Of interest in this apocalypse is also the detailed picture of the end in which one finds not only the expected punishment of the wicked and reward of the righteous, but also a new Jerusalem (90:28-33) and a figure - a white bull - who recalls the imagery of the patriarchal period and may be a messiah, though he is not called one (90:37-38). In fact all are transformed into white bulls in imitation of the primordial age (90:38).' VANDERKAM 2000: 294.

<sup>215</sup> 1En 90:30-31, in ISAAC, *OTP* 1: 71.

The ram is interpreted as being the prophet Elijah, who had been brought along with Enoch in Paradise to witness the Last Judgement.<sup>216</sup> Here it can be observed to be the first attestation of a tradition according to which both Enoch and Elijah are seen as eschatological agents. Nickelsburg, analysing the chronological order of events, observes that v. 31 could have been ‘transposed from its chronologically correct location between vv. 19 and 20, or that “before the judgement took place” is a scribal gloss that ties Enoch’s and Elijah’s return to earth to the tradition of their participation in the judgement’.<sup>217</sup> Jackson concludes affirming that, ‘Enoch’s second vision completed, we are left in no doubt but that the pattern of the Book of Watchers’ myth of the fallen Watchers has become a paradigm exemplar by which the author’s past, present and eschatological future may be understood.’<sup>218</sup>

Although many considered the *Animal Apocalypse* to be a militant text of pro-Maccabean propaganda, Daniel Assefa, based on the reception analysis, demonstrated in a recent monograph that such an assumption is false.<sup>219</sup>

#### 2.2.4 The Second Book of Enoch

2 Enoch, also known as *Slavonic Enoch* or *The Secrets of Enoch* is an apocalyptic pseudepigraphon,<sup>220</sup> originally written in the late first century (Second-Temple Judaism). The full text has been preserved only in Slavonic (*Merilo Pravednoe*)<sup>221</sup>, but in 2009 it was announced that some fragments of 2 Enoch in Coptic were identified.<sup>222</sup> The four fragments were found during the excavations by the British Egypt Exploration Society in 1972 in Quasr Ibrim (Nubia, Egypt). The four consecutive leaves of a parchment codex preserved in Coptic represent the short recension of the chapters 36-42 of 2 Enoch.<sup>223</sup> This recent discovery of great importance, the first non-Slavonic

<sup>216</sup> Cf. BLACK 1985: 279; NICKELSBURG 2001: 405. MULDER (2003: 97) identifies Elijah with Enoch in 1En. 90:31.

<sup>217</sup> NICKELSBURG (2001: 405) identifies two problems in v. 31: the identity of the ram (Judas Maccabeus or Elijah), and the placement of the verse, which does not follow the chronological order of events.

<sup>218</sup> JACKSON 2004: 39.

<sup>219</sup> ASSEFA 2007: 328-334.

<sup>220</sup> DEXINGER 1977: 17-18.

<sup>221</sup> There are more than twenty Slavonic manuscripts preserved, along with other fragments of the text from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the Slavic milieu of the translation, see: OEGEMA 2001: 154-157.

<sup>222</sup> The announcement was made in 2009 on the Enoch Seminar website, and the discovery was presented at the Fifth Enoch Seminar in Naples (14-18 June 2009): <http://enochseminar.org/#app=86a0&bda6-selectedIndex=5> (08/02/2010).

<sup>223</sup> The Coptic text is not published yet and only photographic copies of the manuscript have been made.

manuscript, confirms the idea that the Book of 2 Enoch is a translation from a Greek source, and predates the accepted date of the translation into Slavonic (11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Coptic text being the oldest manuscript known so far. Although the longer recension<sup>224</sup> priority was recently advocated by many scholars, this Coptic witness of the short recension<sup>225</sup> demands a new discussion on this matter.

Although some authors consider 2En a first-century Christian writing,<sup>226</sup> the majority of scholars regard it to be originally composed by an unknown Jewish sectarian group. 'Evidence seems to point in the direction of a Jewish background: the exaltation of Enoch and lack of reference to any kind of saviour indicate that it is unlikely that this text originated in purely Christian circles.'<sup>227</sup> The central theme of the writing is the ascent into heaven of the patriarch Enoch, his metamorphosis near the Throne of Glory, and his initiation into the secrets of heaven.

In 2 Enoch 3:1-3 J (the longer recension) or 3:1 A (the shorter recension) Enoch (at the age of 365) is taken in by two angels through the seven heavens.

1 And it came about, when I had spoken to my sons, those men called me. And they took me up onto their wings, and carried me up to the first heaven, and placed me on the clouds. 2 And, behold, they were moving. And there I perceived the air higher up, and higher still I saw the ether. 3 And they placed me on the first heaven. And they showed me a vast ocean, much bigger than the earthly ocean.<sup>228</sup>

Enoch is now carried up before the Lord by the Archangel Gabriel (21:5-6 J&A) and sees the great throne in the seventh heaven (22:1-3 J&A). Following this, Enoch is clothed by Michael 'the Lord's archistratig'<sup>229</sup> (22:8-10 J&A) and is revealed 'all the

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. SCHMIDT 1921: 307-312.

<sup>225</sup> The four fragments from chapters 26-42 in Coptic follow the short recension and are related to manuscript U.

<sup>226</sup> Among others: VAILLANT 1952: viii-xiii: 'C'est un *Hénoch* judéo-chrétien continuation et contrepartie chrétienne de l'*Henoch* juif antérieur. Les rapports avec l'*Henoch* juif sont étroits' (p. ix). RUBINSTEIN (1962: 1-21), although disagreeing with some of VAILLANT's arguments, supports the view of a Christian background of 2En.

<sup>227</sup> GOODER 2006: 70.

<sup>228</sup> 2En 3:1-3 J. The shorter recension (2En 3:1 in ANDERSEN, *OTP* 1: 110-111) reads: 'And it came about, when I had spoken to my sons, the men called me. And they took me up onto their wings, and carried me up to the first heaven. And they put me down there.'

<sup>229</sup> Michael is designated as 'the Lord's archistratig' by the longer recension, and 'the Lord's greatest archangel' by the shorter one, adjectives derived probably from the tradition according to which Michael is the field commander of the Army of God (cf. Dan 10:13, 21; Josh 5:13-15; 1En 40:9).

things of heaven and earth' (23:1 J) for 30 days and nights.<sup>230</sup> He is given a thirty-day period to live on earth and share his knowledge with his sons (ch. 36 J&A) with the promise to return to heaven after this time ends. After this rapture experience, Enoch needs to chill his face because he 'could not endure the terror of the burning of the fire' (ch. 37 J&A).<sup>231</sup> After his return to earth and instructions given to his sons, the passage 2 Enoch 67:1-3 J&A describes, at the end of the thirty days, the final departure of Enoch to heaven:

And when Enoch had spoken to his people,  
[the Lord]<sup>232</sup>  
sent the  
gloom onto the earth, and became dark and covered the men who were standing [and talking] with Enoch. And the angels hurried and grasped Enoch and carried him up to the highest heaven, where the lord received him and made him stand in front of his face for eternity. Then the darkness departed from the earth, and it became light.  
And the people looked, but they could not figure out how Enoch had been taken away.<sup>233</sup>  
And they glorified God. And then they [all] went to their homes.<sup>234</sup>

Enoch's final rapture to heaven appears to be physical (in body), taking into account that he instructs his sons not to seek for him (note the resemblance to Elijah's ascension in 2Kgs 2).<sup>235</sup> As Himmelfarb argues, the transformation of Enoch before the divine throne into an angel 'stands in the center of a group of eight early Jewish and Christian apocalypses in which the ascent to heaven is the mode of revelation.'<sup>236</sup> The text shows resemblance to the Metratron tradition of rabbinic Merkabah and Hekhalot mysticism, showing that 2 Enoch represents a bridge between the early apocalyptic Enochic narratives and the later mystical traditions.<sup>237</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins suggests that 2

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<sup>230</sup> The Lord asks the angel Vereviel (probably archangel Uriel) to dictate to Enoch for 30 days and 30 nights 360 books (366 according to J) containing revelation about everything knowable (ch. 23 J&A). Afterwards, God himself gives Enoch information about the creation of the world (24:2-32:2 J; 24:2-30:8 A) and its history until the flood (chs. 33-35 J&A).

<sup>231</sup> Here the text suggests that no human can see the Lord and not be dead unless God decides otherwise. The seeing of the Lord is compared with fire (37:1 J&A), the heat of the sun and the frost of death (37:1 J). His face is cooled down by a senior angel with snow, adapting him for the return to human company. This episode can serve as an argument on the possibility of physical ascensions, but it must be understood as a vision of the place where the Lord lives.

<sup>232</sup> Found in the short recension.

<sup>233</sup> The shorter recension reads: *And the people looked, and they understood how Enoch had been taken away.* OTP 1: 195.

<sup>234</sup> 2En 67:1-3, in ANDERSEN, OTP 1: 194.

<sup>235</sup> 'The ascent appears to be a bodily one as Enoch instructs his sons not to seek for him in his absence and descends once again to speak to them after the ascent.' GOODER 2006: 77; cf. CHAIGNON 2008: 59.

<sup>236</sup> HIMMELFARB 1993: 3.

<sup>237</sup> ORLOV 2007: 137-138

Enoch presents a strong interest in astronomical phenomena, and thus it is related to The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries.<sup>238</sup>

### 2.2.5 The Book of Jubilees

The pseudepigraphical *Book of Jubilees*<sup>239</sup> recounts the revelation received by Moses on Mount Sinai, during the forty days (Exod 24:18). The writing is generally dated in the second century B.C.<sup>240</sup> and composed by a Jew, probably descendant from a priestly family, in Palestine. Several manuscripts are extant in Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Latin and Ethiopic; Hebrew being the original language.<sup>241</sup> The book of Jubilees retells the narration found in Genesis and the first half of Exodus (from Gen 1 to Exod 24). However, James VanderKam observed that the narration ‘... is not merely a reproduction of Genesis-Exodus but a rewriting or retelling of them from a particular standpoint and with definite purposes’.<sup>242</sup>

After an introductory chapter which precedes the ‘creation narrative’ (1:1-29), Jubilees begins with story of creation and the first humans until the birth of Abram, son of Terah (2:1-11:13), and continues with the life of Abraham (11:14-22:30), his death and burial (23:1-10) and an account of Jacob’s early life (24:1-29:20). The subsequent chapters speak of the priestly role of Levi (30:1-32:34), the wars of Jacob (34:1-38:24), a condensation of the Joseph stories (39:1-45:15), and the Moses story and the laws concerning Passover, Jubilees and the Sabbath (46:1-50:13). The account of Enoch’s life is found in Enoch (4:17-26) and ‘there are several features that connect Enoch and Jacob’.<sup>243</sup>

<sup>23</sup> And he was taken from among the children of men, and we led them to the garden of Eden for greatness and honour. And behold, he is there writing condemnation and

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<sup>238</sup> *The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries* or *The Astronomical Book* is a pericope written in the fourth-third century B.C. and preserved in 1 Enoch 72-82. It contains a description of the movement of heavenly bodies and of the firmament, as revealed to Enoch during his trips to heaven. Cf. COLLINS 1996: 38-39.

<sup>239</sup> The book is also designated as *Lesser Genesis* (*Leptogenesis*) by several Church Fathers (such as Epiphanius, Didimus of Alexandria, Syncellus, Jerome *et al.*) and regarded as a Pseudepigraphon by Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. It is, however, considered canonical by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and known as the *Book of Division*. Cf. RUITEN 2000: 1-3.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. WINTERMUTE, *OTP* 2: 43-44. Based on the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments of Jubilees (found in caves 1-4 and 11), VANDERKAM (1977: 283-285) suggested the period between 161 and 152 B.C. as the most probable date of the composition.

<sup>241</sup> CHARLES (1902: xxxi-xxxiii) argued against the idea that the original language was Aramaic and for a Hebrew original.

<sup>242</sup> VANDERKAM 2001: 11.

<sup>243</sup> KVANVIG 2005: 76; cf. BERGER 1973-1999: 301.

judgement of the world, and all of the evils of the children of men. <sup>244</sup> And because of him none of the water of the Flood came upon the whole land of Eden, for he was put there for a sign and so that he might bear witness against all of the children of men so that he might relate all of the deeds of the generations until the day of judgement. <sup>244</sup>

The central theme of Jubilees is the problem of impurity. As Lutz Doering observes, ‘in the period before Sinai, Jubilees allocates purity laws, both “ritual” and “moral”, to this period at appropriate points in the narrative... The emphasis on purity, both forms taken together, is considerable. Purity is mentioned for the first time shortly after the first section of the Sabbath (Jub 3:8-14, following 2:1, 17-33).’<sup>245</sup> In this context of the discussion about purity and impurity, Enoch is presented as testifier against the Watchers, who ‘have defiled themselves with earthly women’ (Jub 4:22), and this fall causes the flood.<sup>246</sup>

This account about Enoch’s life differs from the presentation in Gen 5:21-24, which is interpreted in Jubilees.<sup>247</sup> ‘Enoch was with the angels (this is an interpretation of the biblical phrase usually translated *he walked with God*) for 294 years (= six jubilees of years) during which they instructed him about calendrical matters such as the dominion of the sun.’<sup>248</sup> Based on earlier traditions of Enoch, in Jubilees he is presented as a teacher, priest and judge.<sup>249</sup> Enoch will live with the angels from now on, ‘separately from the rest of humanity, recording their actions until the “day of judgement,” the point in time between this world and the eschatological era’.<sup>250</sup> The text expresses the idea that Enoch did not die, but lives in heaven and judges all of humanity.<sup>251</sup> According to Gene Davenport, the passage contains eschatological terms, such as: the function of the record keeping of the men’s deeds (Jub 4:24) or Enoch’s portrayal as a high priest (Jub 2:25-26).<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Jub. 4:23-24, in WINTERMUTE, *OTP* 2: 62-63.

<sup>245</sup> DOERING 2009: 274-275.

<sup>246</sup> KVANVIG 2005: 76: ‘The acts of the Watchers constituted the paradigm for three kinds of evil that humans should avoid: fornication, uncleanness, and injustice. These basic evils were all embedded in the acts of the Watchers and repeated by the sinners through history.’

<sup>247</sup> SCOTT 2005: 55-58.

<sup>248</sup> VANDERKAM 2001: 33.

<sup>249</sup> ‘The author of *Jubilees* was aware of many of the early traditions which surrounded Enoch. According to some writers, the author of Jubilees betrays the influence of several parts of *1 Enoch* especially in *Jub. 4:17-26*.’ RUITEN 2000: 165; cf. VANDERKAM 2000: 318.

<sup>250</sup> SEGAL 2007: 165.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. MULDER 2003: 92-94; CHAIGNON 2008: 58.

<sup>252</sup> ‘Enoch’s sacrifices are beneficial for men on earth. To put it another way, life is not hopeless, for we have a mediator in the heavenly realm.’ DAVENPORT 1971: 85-86.

### 2.2.6 Second Baruch

The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, or 2 Baruch<sup>253</sup>, is a pseudepigraphical writing attributed to Baruch, the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah. The entire document is preserved only in a Syriac version of the sixth century A.D., but another text covering chapters 3-77 is extant in Arabic<sup>254</sup>, and some other fragments preserved in Greek are found in the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 403*. The majority of scholars consider the book to be a Jewish composition, the Syriac document being a translation of a Greek translation of a Hebrew text.<sup>255</sup> However, Rivka Nir argues upon the provenance of the writing and tries to demonstrate its Christian origin by analysing parallels to Second Baruch found in biblical, non-canonical, rabbinic and patristic literature. She claims that 2Bar is a Christian work not because it contains Christian elements, but because it does not.<sup>256</sup> Her hypothesis is not plausible and was challenged by many authors since its publication.<sup>257</sup> In general acceptance, the composition is dated between A.D. 70 and 132,<sup>258</sup> probably in Palestine. 2 Baruch is concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 and represents a Pharisaic apologetic writing.<sup>259</sup> Although the majority of critics consider the book a unity, some scholars see it as a composite work. Because of the numerous affinities between 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra it was assumed the

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<sup>253</sup> Generally, 87 chapters or sections of 2 Baruch include the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (chapters 1-77) and the *Epistle of Baruch* (chapters 78-87). CHARLES argues that the Epistle was not a part of the original document and that it was incorporated in the later Syriac Bible. Cf. CHARLES 1913: 470.

<sup>254</sup> Fred LEEMHUIS (1989: 19-26), argues that the Arabic text version might be a Christian translation.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. REDDISH 1995: 97: 'The work is thoroughly Jewish, showing little, if any, sign of Christian interpolation.' However, OEGEMA (2001: 59) stresses that it is difficult to find a Semitic origin for the Syrian version.

<sup>256</sup> 'The *Syriac Baruch*, in its extant form, is a Christian work, whose internal structure, ideas, and tendencies may only be understood against the background of Christian theology. True, it does not contain any obviously Christian statements, nor is the name of the Christian Messiah mentioned there explicitly; rather it expresses its outlook in an allusive and subtle way in comparison to other pseudepigraphic works related to it. But this fact should not mislead us, as it is precisely the absence of explicitly Christian feature that may at times serve as the key to the identification and understanding of a work.' NIR 2003: 199.

<sup>257</sup> 'It may be true that the old assumption that every text that is not clearly Christian therefore must be Jewish can no longer maintained, but why is it any more plausible to argue with NIR that 2 *Baruch*, which in her reading is not clearly a Jewish text, therefore must be Christian? NIR's analysis is plagued with insurmountable methodological problems.' HENZE 2004. 'Rivka NIR's study displays how reception history may become an obstacle to the reading of the Pseudepigrapha in general, and Second Baruch in particular.' LIED 2005: 405.

<sup>258</sup> Daniel M. GURTNER (2008: 23-32), in a recent study on the date of composition and setting of 2Bar, suggests the date A.D. 95.

<sup>259</sup> 'Written by Pharisaic Jews as an apology for Judaism, and in part implicit polemic against Christianity, it gained nevertheless a larger circulation amongst Christians than amongst Jews, and owed its very preservation to the scholarly cares of the Church it assailed.' CHARLES 1913: 470.

same authorship, but the idea was not sustained by later authors. However, Zwiep stresses that ‘Second Baruch represents a stream of tradition that is paralleled by Fourth Ezra.’<sup>260</sup> Following Bogaert’s literary structure,<sup>261</sup> Gwendolyn Sayler arranges the text into sub-units and seven blocks.<sup>262</sup>

In the fifth section or block of 2 Baruch (2Bar 44-52) two mentions of the ascension of Baruch are found. The first account, 2Bar 46:6c-7 represents a conversation between Baruch and his community:

Which I before told you of; nor shall ye fall into the torment, of which I testified to you before. But with regard to the word that I was to be taken I did not make (it) known to them or to my son.<sup>263</sup>

Charles argues that this represents an addition made by the final editor in order to adapt the fragment of 2Bar 44:1, and did not belong to the original composition. Baruch predicts to his son and to another seven elders his own death, and the people express their concern that Baruch will leave them. The text follows the tradition of the ascension into heaven of great heroes, suggesting a rapture story.

The second report (2Bar 48:29-31) is found in Baruch’s dialogue with the Lord (2Bar 48:2-25), which is a response to his previous prayer:<sup>264</sup>

For this is as follows: he that is corrupted is not at all; he has both wrought iniquity so far as he could do anything, and has not remembered My goodness, nor accepted My long-suffering. Therefore thou shalt surely be taken up, as I before told thee. For that time shall arise which brings affliction; for it shall come and pass by with quick vehemence, and it shall be turbulent coming in the heat of indignation.<sup>265</sup>

In the subsequent conversation God speaks with Baruch about ‘the final stages of the scenario which will culminate in eschatological judgement against all nations (48:29-41)’<sup>266</sup> and receives the promise to be ascended into heaven. But before his departure he

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<sup>260</sup> ZWIEP 2001: 341.

<sup>261</sup> BOGAERT 1969: 58-67.

<sup>262</sup> Block 1 (chapters 1-5), block 2 (chapters 6-20), block 3 (chapters 21-30), block 4 (chapters 31-43), block 5 (chapters 44-52), block 6 (chapters 53-76), block 7 (chapter 77). Cf. SAYLER 1984: 11-13. A further block containing chapters 78-87, known also as the *Letter (or Epistle) of Baruch to the nine and one-half tribes* is added to the *Apocalypse* in some editions of the Peshitta. See also MURPHY’s scheme based on thematic lines (1985: 12), and KLIJN 1989: 4-7.

<sup>263</sup> 2Bar. 46:6c-7, in CHARLES, *APOT* 2: 504. REDDISH (1995: 118), in his revision of CHARLES’ translation reads: ‘But I said nothing about my being taken up, either to them or to my son.’

<sup>264</sup> Cf. WILLETT 1989: 93-94.

<sup>265</sup> 2Bar. 48:29-31, in CHARLES, *APOT* 2: 506.

<sup>266</sup> SAYLER 1984: 30.



must instruct the people during a forty-day period, as the angel states in 2Bar 76:1-5.<sup>267</sup> This rapture account must be understood in the light of the bodily ascension tradition within Jewish history, and is not to be interpreted literally.

### 2.2.7 Apocalypse of Zosimus (History of the Rechabites)<sup>268</sup>

This composite apocryphon describes ‘the journey of the monk Zosimus to the Isle of the Blessed Ones, and his encounter with the inhabitants who claim to be the Rechabites encountered by Jeremiah in the closing years of the Judean monarchy.’<sup>269</sup> The writing in the present form was compiled not earlier than the fifth or sixth century A.D.,<sup>270</sup> and is preserved in many ancient languages, the most important being the Ethiopic, the Greek and the Syriac.<sup>271</sup> The original language and provenance are difficult to identify. Knights argues that chapters 8-10 of the document (which he calls The History of the Rechabites) are Jewish, but composed in Greek and included later in the text of the Story of Zosimus, a Greek text.<sup>272</sup> ‘At this stage in our work it is best to suggest only that sections of this document are Jewish or heavily influenced by Jewish traditions, and that they may antedate the second century A.D.’<sup>273</sup> Most probably, we are dealing with a Christian story dependent on Jewish apocryphal literature or traditions.<sup>274</sup>

At some point, the writing describes the paradisiacal state of the Rechabites, and depicts with significant details the death of the body and the ascension of the soul (14:1a-

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<sup>267</sup> ‘The passage is clearly styled after a Moses typology (cf. Deut 34:1-3). It is announced by an angel-interpreter that Baruch will escape death to be “kept unto (the end) of times” (v.2), that is, he will be physically taken up into heaven, where he will be preserved unto the end of times (i.e. the day of judgement). At the final judgement he will stand up as a witness (13:3; cf. 25:1). As in 4 Ezra 14, a forty day period of final instructions precedes the rapture (v.4).’ ZWIEP 2001: 341-342.

<sup>268</sup> The story received many other titles in MSS and translations: History of the Rechabites, Apocalypse of Zosimus; Narrative of Zosimus (or Narratio Zosimi); Testament of Zosimus; The Abode of the Blessed; History of the Sons of Jonadab, son of Rechab.

<sup>269</sup> KNIGHTS 1997: 53.

<sup>270</sup> JAMES 1893: 95.

<sup>271</sup> CHARLESWORTH 1982: 1-2.

<sup>272</sup> KNIGHTS 1998: 81. Ronit NIKOLSKY (2002: 185) identifies chapters 8-10 (*Journey of Zosimus*) as an ‘early Byzantine Palestinian Christian story’, and argues that the Jeremiah traditions form the basis of this document.

<sup>273</sup> CHARLESWORTH, *OTP* 2: 445.

<sup>274</sup> The Jewish sources of the book, although remaining unknown and hard to identify based on the extant MSS (cf. the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35), strongly influenced the text. In my opinion, the ascension of the souls, as described in HistRech 16:1-1a represents one of the elements preserved from an earlier Jewish tradition (cf. Gen. 35:18-19; Ecc. 12:7).

16:8g).<sup>275</sup> The account of the ascension of the souls to heaven, 16:1-1a,<sup>276</sup> might be a part of an earlier Jewish apocalyptic writing:

And while we are looking at the holy and spotless soul, the holy angels carry it away and salute it, and thus ascends and goes up from us in glory. And after it ascends with them and passes into the region of the power of the highest heavens, then other orders (of angels) receive it with joy. And the archangels salute it, and afterwards they stretch it out to it (their hands and lead it) to the thrones and dominions that are above them. And thus it goes up and ascends until it enters (before) and worships the Lord.<sup>277</sup>

In his introduction to the History of the Rechabites translation, Charlesworth argues that the Syriac text is often the best witness to the most primitive text and that, based on the Syriac *Vorlage*, the passage we discuss might be 'earlier and possibly Jewish'.<sup>278</sup> However, we can identify a unity in the speech of the Blessed Ones (chapters 11-16), which describes their life and death.

### 2.2.8 The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls (or *Qumran Scrolls*), discovered between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves around the settlement of Khirbet Qumran (Judaean Desert), represent circa 900 documents, including fragments from the Hebrew bible.<sup>279</sup>

In a fragment found in cave 4 and attributed by Maurice Baillet to the *War Scroll* (4Q491 frg. 11, col. I)<sup>280</sup> is preserved a hymn in which an anonymous narrator sits in heaven sharing the lot of angels. The fragment was incorrectly classified and has been shown to be of a separate composition. Four other fragments of 4QM<sup>h</sup> contained the hymn and were labelled 4Q471<sup>b</sup> (the *Self-Glorification Hymn*<sup>281</sup>). Ester Eshel identified

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<sup>275</sup> This fragment is a part of what KNIGHTS (1998: 79) called *The abode of the Blessed* (chapters 11-16).

<sup>276</sup> CHARLESWORTH (*OTP* 2: 444-445) claimed that chs. 3-7 and 11-16:1a represent, in fact, a Jewish apocalypse and that chapters 2 and 16: 1b-18 are Christian additions.

<sup>277</sup> HistRech. 16:1-1a, in CHARLESWORTH, *OTP* 2: 459.

<sup>278</sup> CHARLESWORTH, *OTP* 2: 444. Further on, KNIGHTS (1998: 87) suggests that chapter 16 is a true Jewish story.

<sup>279</sup> Written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek on parchment and papyrus, the scrolls date between 200 B.C. and A.D. 68-69 and are traditionally identified with the Essene sect. The Dead Sea Scrolls can be divided into three groups: biblical texts, Pseudepigrapha (Enoch, Jubilees, Tobit, Sirach etc.), and sectarian documents (Community Rule, War Scroll, Peshier on Habakkuk and Rule of the Blessing). Cf. CHARLESWORTH 1992: xxxi-xxxv; EISENMAN; WISE 1992: 1-16.

<sup>280</sup> BAILLET (1982: 26-29) labelled this fragment as 'Cantique de Michel', identifying the speaker with the archangel Michael.

<sup>280</sup> BAILLET (1982: 26-29) labelled this fragment as 'Cantique de Michel', identifying the speaker with the archangel Michael.

<sup>281</sup> The text is commonly recognised as *The Self-Glorification Hymn*. However, FLETCHER-LOUIS (2002: 199-200) designates it as *Glorification Hymn*, to avoid of a 'prejudicial negative value judgement.'

two more witnesses to this ascension text in the *Hodayot Scroll*: 4QH<sup>a</sup> (4Q427) 7 I, and 1QH<sup>a</sup> cols. XXV-XXVI.<sup>282</sup> ‘The *Self-Glorification Hymn* is thus preserved in four manuscripts.’<sup>283</sup> Eshel also identified two recensions of the text: Recension A (4QH<sup>a</sup> 7 I, 4Q471<sup>b</sup>, 1QH<sup>a</sup>) and a longer Recension B (4Q491<sup>b</sup>).<sup>284</sup> The hymn copied on 4Q471<sup>b</sup> on the beginning of the sheet might be the first column of the manuscript:<sup>285</sup>

1 [... I am r]eckon[ed with the angels, my dwelling is in] the holy 2 council.] Wh[o has been accounted despicable like me? And who] has been oppressed like [me? And who] 3 has been shunned [by men] like me? [And who] compares to m[e in enduring] evil? [No teaching] 4 compares to my teaching. [For] I sit [... in heaven] 5 Who is like me among the angels? [Who could cut off my words? And who] 6 could measure the [flow] of my lips? Who [can associate with me in speech, and thus compare with my judgement? I] 7 am the beloved of the King, a companion of the ho[ly ones, and none can accompany me. And to my glory] 8 none can compare, for I [have my station with the angels and my glory with the sons of the King. Neither] 9 with gold <I> will crown myself, nor [with refined gold... 10 [...] Sing, [O, beloved ones...<sup>286</sup>

On the question of the narrator’s identity, Morton Smith concluded that ‘Baillet’s attribution of the speech to Michael is useful only because it demonstrates that he has not understood it.’<sup>287</sup> Eshel, however, compared the speaker in the *Self-Glorification Hymn* with the eschatological High Priest, saying that ‘the hymn was spoken in the name of this Eschatological High Priest’, and that he resembles with ‘the figure of the Teacher of Righteousness’, who was ‘the main influential figure in the early days of the sect’s existence’ (cf. CD I 11).<sup>288</sup> Therefore the hymnist is a human being who declares himself taken up into heaven and enthroned in the heavenly realm.<sup>289</sup> As Zwiep also

<sup>282</sup> ‘The state of preservation of 4Q manuscripts allows neither a reconstruction of the overall shape of the older stage of the material nor a determination of how much of the older material has been eliminated, and how many portions have been added in the later recension.’ FREY 1997: 309.

<sup>283</sup> ESHEL 1999: 619. The manuscripts are dated as following: 4Q471<sup>b</sup> frgs. 1-2 to the Herodian Period; 4Q491<sup>b</sup> frgs. 1-2 to the Late Hasmonean Period; 4QH<sup>a</sup> (4Q427) frg. 7 col. I and frg. 12 to the Late Hasmonean – Early Herodian Period; 1QH<sup>a</sup> col. XXIV to the Herodian Period.

<sup>284</sup> For the text and the translation of both recensions, see: ESHEL 1996: 189-191.

<sup>285</sup> ESHEL 1996: 191; cf. WISE, 2000: 199.

<sup>286</sup> 4Q471<sup>b</sup> frgs. 1-4, in ESHEL 1999: 620. Cf Ps 8:4-5.

<sup>287</sup> SMITH 1992: 297.

<sup>288</sup> ESHEL 1999: 635: ‘For the followers of the Teacher of Righteousness it was probably very difficult to accept the scenario that such a significant figure as the Teacher of Righteousness would disappear from the historical stage. It is possible, therefore, that some followers of the Teacher of Righteousness identified him with an eschatological figure, to be revealed at the End of Days. The resemblance between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Eschatological High Priest could have led some scribes to incorporate the *Hymn of Self-Glorification*, which was composed in the name of the Eschatological High Priest, into the *Hodayot Scroll*.’

<sup>289</sup> In ESHEL’s opinion (1996: 195), ‘this figure does not seem to be of angelic origin, but rather a human being who has been elevated to share the lot of the angels.’ Cf. ZIMMERMANN 1998: 300.

suggests, ‘texts such as 11QMelchizedek (11Q13) and the mysterious “Self-Glorification Hymn” in the War Scroll (4Q491 frag. 11 I 13-24) have been explained (with differing degrees of plausibility) in terms of a real apotheosis of a human being.’<sup>290</sup> Crispin Fletcher-Louis argues that ‘there is nothing in *Glorification Hymn B* which itself suggests an eschatological perspective’ and, therefore, that the speaker ‘is a priest who describes his experience of apotheosis during the liturgy of the community’s worship’.<sup>291</sup>

The text refers to ‘a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods’ which has been occupied by the narrator. Michael Knibb, referring to the character of the hymn, asserted that the missing beginning of the blessing of the high priest would have clarified the character of the document as a whole.<sup>292</sup> ‘Both the *Self-Glorification Hymn* and *11Q Melchizedek* might represent an extreme messianic group within the Qumran community, which saw the Community’s own leader as the messianic king and priest.’<sup>293</sup>

In conclusion to the discussion on the ascension in the Old Testament and the pseudepigraphical writings, some general lines shall be traced. The rapture traditions of the souls received much attention in Jewish thought and led in the case of the heroic figures to a belief that their bodies were translated into heaven. In Derek ’Erez Zuta 1.8 is mentioned that ‘there were nine who entered the Garden of Eden alive, viz.: Enoch the son of Yered, Elijah, the Messiah, Eliezer the servant of Abraham, Hiram, king of Tyre [probably Hiram of Tyre, cf. 1Kgs 7:13f.], Ebed-melech the Cushite, Jabez the son of R. Judah the Prince, Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh, and Serah the daughter of Asher. Some say: Also R. Joshua b. Levi.’<sup>294</sup> Kallah Rabbathi 3.20 mentions seven figures who entered Paradise in their lifetime: [Serah [the daughter of Asher],<sup>295</sup> Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh,<sup>296</sup> Hiram, king of Tyre,<sup>297</sup> Ebed-melech the Ethiopian,<sup>298</sup> Eliezer [the servant of Abraham], the grandson of Judah the Prince, Jabez and some

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<sup>290</sup> ZWIEP 2001: 336.

<sup>291</sup> FLETCHER-LOUIS 2002: 209-215.

<sup>292</sup> KNIBB 1999: 397.

<sup>293</sup> KNOHL 2009: 266.

<sup>294</sup> COHEN 1965: 570.

<sup>295</sup> Ex 8:19.

<sup>296</sup> 1Chron 4:18.

<sup>297</sup> 1Kgs 5.

<sup>298</sup> Jer 38:11ff.

add, R. Joshua b. Levi].<sup>299</sup> Often, some allusions to ascensions (ecstatic visions) in the Old Testament generated ulterior rapture traditions recorded by Jewish apocalyptic writers.

Among the common elements of the rapture stories one can distinguish: a forty days period of final instructions (2Bar 76:4; 4Ezra 14:23, 36, 42, 44-45; 2En 72:1; HistRech 14:1)<sup>300</sup>, the last discourse before ascension (2Kgs 2:9-10; 2En 66: HistRech 14:1-5a), the departure usually takes place during this last conversation (2Kgs 2:11; 2En 67:1; HistRech 16:1), the eschatological expectation (Sir 48:10; 1En 90:31; 4Ezra 6:25-26, 14:9; 2Bar 48:29-41; Jub 4:23-24), and the prayer of the community to God (2En 68:5; HistRech 17:1).<sup>301</sup> The ascended ones do not *taste death*, and are taken from among the humans into heaven usually by angels of God (1En 87:2; 90:31; 2En 3:1; HistRech 16:1; 4Q471<sup>b</sup> 1). Zwiep observes that ‘when the rapture itself is reported, free use is made of standard rapture motives (mountain, chariot, clouds, etc.) and terminology’<sup>302</sup>. The condition of the ascended one is of a temporary departure into heaven, until the final Judgement day. The ascension traditions of the Jewish texts present the premises for a further analysis of the Ascension of Jesus.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> COHEN 1965: 460-461. The explanation for their rapture is given in at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter (461-462).

<sup>300</sup> Or 30 days in the case of 2En. 36:1f.

<sup>301</sup> A conspicuous resemblance with the Ascension narrative in Acts 1:1-11 can be observed. After forty days (Acts 1:3) and the final instructions given to the apostles (Acts 1:4-8), Jesus ascended into heaven on a cloud (Acts 1:9). The apostles receive the prophecy of Christ’s return from the two angels (Acts 1:10-11), and after returning to Jerusalem, they devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14).

<sup>302</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 78.

<sup>303</sup> The New Testament authors and the Fathers of the early Christian Church interpreted the Jewish ascensions (Enoch, Elijah) as prefigurements of the Messiah’s Ascension and His sitting at the right hand of the Father. The previously analysed texts shall be compared with the New Testament narratives of the Ascension of Jesus in the subsequent chapter.

### CHAPTER 3: THE ASCENSION NARRATIVES IN LUKE-ACTS

The Ascension of Christ into heaven is presented twice by Luke, at the end of his gospel and in the introduction of the Acts of the Apostles. It is commonly accepted by the biblical scholars that the two accounts of the ascension are an integral part of Luke-Acts and not a latter interpolation. In the present chapter I shall present these two Ascension narratives by analysing them separately. A translation, text-critical analysis and interpretation will be included in the first two sections. The similarities and differences between the two narratives (Lk 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11) are due to the specific literary function of each account<sup>304</sup> and will be analysed in the last section of this chapter.

#### 3.1 The Ascension in the Gospel according to Luke (24:50-53)

The text analysed in this section depicts the subsequent events to the resurrection, *i.e.* the Ascension into heaven and the ending of the third gospel. Generally, the text seems not to put serious problems at the first sight, but the Ascension episode is one of great importance, and its correct interpretation substantiates the Christian dogma of the bodily Ascension. The author's account will continue in the book of Acts, which completes in a great way the events presented in this section (cf. Acts 1:2-14). The majority of commentators designate this fragment 'The Ascension of Jesus', marking it as a section of the main theme of chapter 24, 'Christ's resurrection and post-resurrection appearances' or 'From resurrection to Ascension.' The delimitation is understood through the structure of the text itself and through the transition from direct speech (between Christ and the apostles, vv. 48-49) to the narrative speech, which begins with v. 50 and continues until the end. The section is considered unitary by the majority of the NT editions and biblical commentators.<sup>305</sup>

The structure of the chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel reveals a tripartite plan: the empty tomb (vv. 1-12); the apostles Luke and Cleopas on the Emmaus road (vv. 13-35); and

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<sup>304</sup> PARSONS 1987: 191-198.

<sup>305</sup> See: FITZMYER 1998: 265-266; BARTON; MUDDIMAN 2001: 958; MARSHALL 1978: 907-911; BURTON 1900: 344; ENSLIN 1928: 60-73; HARPER; GOODSPEED 1890: 355-360; TENNEY 1986: 158.

the last appearance of Christ to the apostolic group (vv. 36-53).<sup>306</sup> In turn, the last section may be divided into three scenes: a narrative of the appearance or recognition scene (vv. 36-43); the words of the paschal instruction or a pedagogical scene (vv. 44-49); and the Ascension or a departure scene (vv. 50-53). Analysing the form of the last scene we may identify a further structure: a narrative passage or a story (vv. 36-43); Christ's speech or discourse (vv. 44-49); and a narrative (vv. 50-53).<sup>307</sup> The structure of the passage is parallel and not concentric. Jesus leads the disciples towards Bethany (v. 50a) to the place of the Ascension, from which they will return to Jerusalem (v. 52). Moreover, Christ is blessing them (v. 50b - εὐλογία), and, in return, the apostles will bless God in the temple (v. 53 - εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν). The Ascension is the element that unites this structure of the passage (v. 51).<sup>308</sup> The preparing of the Ascension episode is obvious through the words Christ addressed to his disciples, in the form of the promise to send the Spirit 'from on high' (vv. 48-49). There are no difficulties in reconstructing the logical unity of the text.

From the perspective of the form-critical structure the description of the Ascension follows the OT pattern of departure stories (or final scenes). The final scene of the gospel 'contains the blessing (24:50-51), the departure (24:51), the response of the witnesses (24:52b), and the act of obedience (24:52a; cf. 24:49).<sup>309</sup> In Luke 24:50-53, the apostles follow their Master along the road to Bethany; Christ blesses them and bodily ascends into heaven. After these moments, the apostles return to Jerusalem and are filled with spiritual joy and bless God in the temple.

From the thematic point of view, the section may be divided in two parts: the Ascension into heaven (24:50-51) and the apostles in the temple (24:52-53).<sup>310</sup> This structure is based on the ideas presented by the author, the Ascension events and the subsequent apostles' actions, the return to Jerusalem and the praying in the temple.

<sup>306</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 147; DILLON 1978: 16-226; ZWIEP 1997: 86; LEE 1999: 198-199.

<sup>307</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 147-148: 'Eine für uns entscheidende Frage ist nun, ob Teil C [vv. 50-53] mit den Teilen A [vv. 36-43] und B [vv. 44-49] traditionsgeschichtlich zusammengehört oder ob die Verbindung erst durch Lukas hergestellt wurde.'

<sup>308</sup> BOVON 2009: 606.

<sup>309</sup> PARSONS 1987: 56.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. MIHOC; MIHOC; MIHOC 2001: 144.

Ἐξήγαγεν δὲ αὐτοὺς [ἕξω] ἕως πρὸς Βηθανίαν, καὶ ἐπάρας τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ εὐλόγησεν αὐτούς.	<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and he raised his hands and blessed them.
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The Ascension scene is tied to the previous verses through the copulative δὲ.<sup>311</sup> After a final discourse which contains the last instructions (vv. 44-49), Christ leads the eleven apostles as far as to the vicinity of Bethany.<sup>312</sup> Two of problems raised by the text are related to the Lukan framework (*Rahmen*): the location (Bethany or the Mount of Olives) and the time of the Ascension (on the day of resurrection or forty days later).

Regarding the place where the events described in vv. 50-51 took place, it is certain that this is outside Jerusalem. Bethany (*el-Azaryeh*), the village of Martha, her sister Mary, and Lazarus (John 11:1), and also of Simon the leper (Matt 26:6), was situated on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives.<sup>313</sup> In John 11:18 is specified to be located at a distance of approximately 15 stadia from Jerusalem (approx. 2,775 km).<sup>314</sup> Zwiep considers that Luke situated Bethany on the Mount of Olives and in the vicinity of Jerusalem.<sup>315</sup> In Acts 1, the author mentions the Mount of Olives as the place of the Ascension, and this does not contradict the description in Luke 24.<sup>316</sup> ‘While the Mount of Olives location could be symbolic (see Matt 28:16; Mark 13:3; cf. 1Sam 15:30, 32; Ezek 11:23; Zech 14:4), the (near) Bethany location would seem to require some basis in tradition.’<sup>317</sup> In the same direction, François Bovon identifies here an OT tradition which links the coming of the Lord to the Mount of Olives.<sup>318</sup> Furthermore, Kosanke observes that ‘this was the location from which Jesus entered Jerusalem (Lk 19:29).’<sup>319</sup> Bede interprets Bethany as the ‘house of obedience’ and states that ‘just as Bethany

<sup>311</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 89; DAVIES 1958: 48.

<sup>312</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 166-167.

<sup>313</sup> MAY 1976: 87, 124.

<sup>314</sup> In Acts 1:12 the distance between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem is specified: ‘a sabbath day’s journey away’.

<sup>315</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 89.

<sup>316</sup> FITZMYER 1985: 1589-1590.

<sup>317</sup> NOLLAND 1993: 1227.

<sup>318</sup> BOVON 2009: 615.

<sup>319</sup> KOSANKE 1993: 67.



represents a Church obedient to the mandates of the Lord, so the Mount of Olives quite fittingly represents the very person of our Lord.’<sup>320</sup>

Regarding the time of the Ascension, in Luke 24 seems to take place on the resurrection day, while in Acts forty days later.<sup>321</sup> Augustine confirms the number of forty days after the resurrection as the date of the Ascension.<sup>322</sup> Going further, it may be insinuated that the Ascension took place during night time.<sup>323</sup> However, no textual evidence suggests this. The author does not explicitly indicate the time in which the event took place. Several hypotheses have been raised to explain the apparent contradiction in this matter.<sup>324</sup> As Zwiep also affirms, the most satisfactory solution seems to be the chronological break hypothesis.<sup>325</sup> The event presented by Luke is clearly different from that of the resurrection and the hypothesis supported by some commentators, according to which Lk 24:50-51 describes the resurrection, and not the Ascension, cannot be sustained.<sup>326</sup> As Zwiep affirms, ‘the chronological framework of Lk 24 is to be regarded as the result of Luke’s compact story-telling, by which he draws together various elements to form a single uninterrupted story-line. The *effect* is that the ascension is firmly tied to the resurrection and appearance story.’<sup>327</sup> The Ascension is not described in detail in the gospel, we are given insufficient information regarding the way in which Christ departed, but all of these will be amplified by the description in the book of Acts (1:9-11).<sup>328</sup> The functions of the two narrations are different,<sup>329</sup> and from theological

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<sup>320</sup> BEDE, *Homilies on the Gospels* II.15, in MARTIN; HURST 1991: 139.

<sup>321</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 89.

<sup>322</sup> Augustine, *Sermon* 268.4, cited by JUST 2003: 393.

<sup>323</sup> CADBURY 1958: 249.

<sup>324</sup> Some reject the two passages (Lk 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11) and regard them as not being authentic, others consider them as describing two different events, and others presuppose that Luke would have received additional information on the time of the Ascension. More and more commentators take into consideration the possibility of a ‘chronological break in the story-line of Lk 24’, or presume that the author has taken ‘two distinct traditions which he reworked separately, without passing judgement upon them’. ZWIEP 1997: 90-91.

<sup>325</sup> PLUMMER 1901: 564: ‘And while he [i.e. Sf. Luca] does not state either here or in ver. 44 that there was any interval at all, still less does he say that there was none: there is no ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (ver. 13). Being without knowledge, or not considering the matter of importance, he says nothing about the interval. But it is incredible that he can mean that, late at night (vv. 29, 33), Jesus led them out to Bethany, and ascended in the dark.’

<sup>326</sup> Among others, see: MORRIS 1988.1: 375-376.

<sup>327</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 92.

<sup>328</sup> SUPPOGU (2007: 119) confirms the compositional originality of the text and considers it to be lukan, without any markan interpolation. In his opinion, the only source used by Luke is L, which he edited.

<sup>329</sup> ‘It is clear that Luke had different purposes in these overlapping accounts. The first is to find a fitting end to his book, the Gospel. It ends as it began, with worship of God in the Temple.’ KURZ 1993: 21.

reasons Luke included in his gospel only a concise description of the Ascension (refusing to provide details).<sup>330</sup> Subsequently, the early Christian Church took over in its cult this unified vision about the resurrection and the Ascension, as it is presented by Luke and John in their gospels (Lk 24:50-51; John 20:17). Observing this, Veselin Kesich affirmed that ‘in the pre-Nicene period the Ascension of Christ was not celebrated as a separate feast, but rather the Church celebrated the mystery of salvation as a whole, one mystery with several remembrances, of which the ascension was one’<sup>331</sup> The apparent inaccuracies in the text of Lk 24:50-53 were interpreted by John Breck by taking into account the theological concerns of the author. ‘In attempting to grasp the real meaning of this celebration, we need to remind ourselves once again that the Gospel writers were concerned less with history than with theology. They sought, through multiple images expressed by divergent traditions, to convey the inner meaning of Christ’s life, even if that led occasionally to inconsistencies (John and Luke offer two differing accounts of Pentecost as well, in John 20 and Acts 2, just as Matthew and Acts differ in their description of Judas’ death).’<sup>332</sup>

The words ἐξήγαγεν ... αὐτούς are interpreted by many authors as referring to an exodus typology.<sup>333</sup> ‘Luke uses the verb *exagein*, the word used in the LXX for Yahweh leading his people out of Egyptian bondage in the exodus.’ (Exod 3:10; 6:6-8; Lev 19:36).<sup>334</sup> Here Zwiep sees a possible link with the text from 2 Kings 2, which presents a initiatory-journey motif.<sup>335</sup> ‘Jesus is about to complete his Exodus (see: 9:31) to his Father.’<sup>336</sup>

Christ is raising his hands and blesses the audience, just like priest Simeon from Sir 50:19-23. Here it can be very clearly observed the impact of the text from Sir 50:20-23 upon the ending of the gospel; ‘so Luke suggests that Jesus is the climax and fulfilment of Israel’s sacred history’.<sup>337</sup> The blessing of Christ brings to memory the blessings from the OT: God blesses Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:28), Noah and his sons after the flood (Gen 9:1), and Abraham and his people (Gen 12:2-3). ‘This is

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<sup>330</sup> MAILE 1986: 34-35. Cf. SMITH 2006: 86-87.

<sup>331</sup> KESICH 1982: 157.

<sup>332</sup> BRECK 2003: 189.

<sup>333</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 87.

<sup>334</sup> FITZMYER 1985: 1589.

<sup>335</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 87.

<sup>336</sup> KARRIS *NJBC* 43:198: 721.

<sup>337</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 88.

the only time in Luke's Gospel where he mentions that Jesus blessed people. At the conclusion of the liturgy of his life Jesus blesses his disciples.'<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, Lohfink suggests that the author of the third Gospel deliberately omitted the blessing of the children recorded by Mark (10:16) in order to reserve it to the 'final blessing' scene.<sup>339</sup> In response to Lohfink's line of reasoning, Marshall considers it 'a precarious argument, especially since a different action (laying on of hands) is described there. Luke's motif may, however, correspond with the "insuflation" in Jn 20:22; this may suggest that some such element was present in the tradition and that Luke has expressed it in his own way.'<sup>340</sup>

Analysing the description of the chapter 50 from Sirach, in v. 50 is reported rather a blessing of a priest (Lev 9:22), than of a patriarch (Gen 48; Deut 33), or a king (1Kgs 8:54-61).<sup>341</sup> Analysing Justin Martyr's understanding of Jesus' earthly ministry, Francis Watson rightly observed that 'the ministry that he has obtained through his human history is a priestly one, again in accordance with the words of the psalm: "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4; Justin, *Dial.* 33).'<sup>342</sup> By blessing, Christ remains together with his disciples while he returns to the Father's bosom, this moment representing 'the paradox of leaving and remaining, of absence and presence'.<sup>343</sup> Augustine said that Christ 'did not depart from the Father. He both came to us and did not forsake the Father. He both took flesh in the womb and continued to govern the universe.'<sup>344</sup>

Parsons links Christ's blessing from the gospel finale with the powerlessness of the priest Zechariah to fulfil his duties in the Temple, as described in the first chapter (Lk

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<sup>338</sup> KARRIS *NJBC* 43:198: 721.

<sup>339</sup> 'An sich kann man aufgrund der drei lukanischen Belege noch nicht sagen, daß Lukas am Motiv des Segnens besonders interessiert sei. Auffällig ist aber nun folgendes: Obwohl Lukas die Szene Mk 10,13-16 übernimmt, klammert er die am Ende der Perikope stehende Segnung der Kinder aus. Daraus folgt jedoch nicht, daß er das Motiv des segnenden Jesus grundsätzlich vermeiden will. Er beseitigt es nur an dieser Stelle, um es am Ende des Evangeliums um so klarer hervortreten zu lassen. Mk 10,16 wird übergangen, um dem Schlußsegen Jesu eine literarisch hervorgehobene Stellung einräumen zu können.' LOHFINK 1971: 167.

<sup>340</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 909.

<sup>341</sup> TORRANCE 1998: 112-115; cf. LEE 1999: 237-238.

<sup>342</sup> WATSON 1997: 321.

<sup>343</sup> BOVON, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (Lk 19,28-24,53)*, p. 617.

<sup>344</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 242.6, in JUST 2003: 392.

1:8-22).<sup>345</sup> In contrast with Zechariah who cannot bless the crowds waiting in front of the temple, Christ completes what Zechariah could not do, blessing the people of God.<sup>346</sup> In the same way as in the Emmaus narrative with the two disciples (Lk 24:31), Jesus will make himself invisible one more time (Lk 24:50).<sup>347</sup>

καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εὐλογεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτοὺς διέστη ἀπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.	<sup>51</sup> And it came about that while he blessed them, he left them and was taken up to heaven.
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During the act of blessing, which is mentioned in v. 51 for the second time, the Lord departs from the midst of his apostles, ascending into heaven.<sup>348</sup> The words καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ used by Luke at the beginning of the description in v. 51 represent a sign, drawing attention to the fact that an important event is happening.<sup>349</sup> The passive form of the verb ἀναφέρω (the *divine passive*<sup>350</sup>) suggests rapture and a gradual ascension. ἀνεφέρετο translates as *to carry or bring up*.<sup>351</sup> In the context v. 51 with reference to the departure of Christ into heaven, the verb translates as *to ascend*.<sup>352</sup> In biblical Greek, the term is used for whatever is lifted up (physical or metaphorical).<sup>353</sup> As Marshall observes, 'the choice of ἀναφέρω is unusual, and unlikely to be due to a copyist at the time when ἀναλαμβάνω had become the established term for the ascension.'<sup>354</sup> The word (under different forms) is also used three times in the gospel<sup>355</sup> and in Acts, five times<sup>356</sup>, but with the meaning from Lk 24:51 we find it only five times in Luke's

<sup>345</sup> 'Le ministère de Zacharie était une liturgie inachevée. À la fin de l'évangile, un prêtre achève son sacrifice par une bénédiction véritable. La liturgie est ici menée à son achèvement.' CHAIGNON 2008: 81.

<sup>346</sup> PARSONS 1987: 74.

<sup>347</sup> TILBORG; COUNET 2000: 103.

<sup>348</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 92: 'Jesus departed from them by suddenly vanishing from the scene (cf. Acts 12:10). It is only in the interpretive words καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν – an explanatory comment from behind the scenes as it were – that the act of withdrawal is interpreted as an ascension, or better, given the passive, as a rapture (*Entrückung*).'

<sup>349</sup> BOVON 2009: 617-618: 'Die für Lukas bezeichnende Wendung καὶ ἐγένετο, »da gesachah es«, gefolgt von ἐν τῷ und einem Infinitiv, dient als Markzeichen: Ein wichtiges Ereignis wird eintreffen. Zwei Verben werden es beschreiben. Das erste bezeichnet die Distanz, die zwischen »ihm« und »ihnen« eintritt, das zweite die Enthebung in den Himmel.'

<sup>350</sup> 'The passive expresses divine action. This is a standard feature of Hellenistic and Jewish rapture stories.' ZWIEP 1997: 92.

<sup>351</sup> Cf. THAYER 1889: 43.

<sup>352</sup> BAUER 1988: 124-125.

<sup>353</sup> SPIQ 1979: 212.

<sup>354</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 909.

<sup>355</sup> Lk 14:11; 16:15b; 18:14b.

<sup>356</sup> Acts 1:2; 1:9; 1:11b; 2:33a; 5:31a.

writings (Lk 24:51; Acts 1:2, 9, 11; 5:31). The term is also used in the same sense in John (12:31: ‘and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself’) and Mark (16:19: ‘So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God’).<sup>357</sup> The terms used to describe the Ascension of Jesus Christ in Luke-Acts are: ἀνάληψις (Lk 9:51), ἀναφέρω (Lk 24:51), ἀναλαμβάνω (Acts 1:2, 22), ἐπαίρω (Acts 1:9), πορεύομαι (Acts 1:10), δέχομαι (Acts 3:21).<sup>358</sup> Furthermore, the verb δίστημι which is used for departure is used only by Luke in the NT (Lk 22:59; Acts 27:28).<sup>359</sup>

The phrase καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν does not appear in some MSS, but the authenticity of the ‘longer text’ was confirmed by the editorial board of the NA<sup>27</sup> critical edition, the shorter text being probably edited by a copyist who considered the description of the Ascension twice redundant.<sup>360</sup> Werner Georg Kümmel argues against the hypothesis according to which the phrase represents an interpolation by a latter author (at the separation of the Gospel from Acts), and considers it untenable.<sup>361</sup> Zwiep, who argued upon this matter in response to Mikeal C. Parsons<sup>362</sup> and Bart D. Ehrman,<sup>363</sup> confirmed the so called ‘longer text of Luke 24:51’ as original, and thus, that it ‘explicitly refers to the Ascension of Jesus’.<sup>364</sup>

Although roughly mentioned, the whole narrative beginning with Lk 9:51 points to this departure of Christ.<sup>365</sup> Jesus is presented in typological relationship with Elijah<sup>366</sup> or Moses,<sup>367</sup> the two eschatological figures recorded as present at the Transfiguration (Lk

<sup>357</sup> The dictionaries generally present three meanings of the term ἀναφέρω: 1. the basic meaning, principal (to lift up, to ascend); 2. leading somebody on high, to take somebody away (Mark 9: 2; Lk 24:51); 3. as a term which describes the offering of a sacrifice. Cf. MIRCEA 1995: 250; NEWMAN 1971: 13.

<sup>358</sup> For a comprehensive list of words which describe the Ascension in the NT, see: METZGER 1969: 120-121.

<sup>359</sup> BDAG: 195 §1; BAUER; ALAND; ALAND, 1988: 393, §1.

<sup>360</sup> METZGER 1994: 162-163; FITZMYER 1985: 1590.

<sup>361</sup> KÜMMEL 1975: 157.

<sup>362</sup> PARSONS 1986: 463-479.

<sup>363</sup> EHRMAN 1993: 227-232.

<sup>364</sup> ZWIEP 2004: 158; cf. ZWIEP 1996: 222-234.

<sup>365</sup> NOLLAND, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, p. 1228.

<sup>366</sup> Thomas L. BRODIE (1990: 72-84) compares the descriptions of the two departures and considers that Luke used the Elijah narrative in organising the material in Lk 24:50-53; cf. JOHNSON 1991: 406.

<sup>367</sup> JOHNSON 1991: 406: ‘It is important at this point to recall the prophetic imagery associated with Moses and Elijah which Luke uses so consistently and flexibly. At the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah were “in glory” with Jesus, and spoke to him about the *exodos* (or: departure) that he was to accomplish in Jerusalem (9:30-31). And when Jesus “set his face” for Jerusalem to begin his prophetic journey to the

9:28-36).<sup>368</sup> Elijah and Moses are seen as the ascended ones of the OT *par excellence*. Elijah's rapture to heaven is the only one explicitly recorded in the OT and, although Moses' death (not rapture) is mentioned, it was widely believed that Moses was assumed as well and even that he wrote his own death before being taken into heaven in a demonstration of meekness and humility.<sup>369</sup>

The whole semantic structure of the Ascension in Luke's gospel develops around v. 51. This moment is the key element of the entire chapter and represents the glorification of Christ. Two simultaneous movements happen: Christ is moving away from his disciples and is ascending into heaven. 'The ascension is not just a departure; it is also an arrival. The ascension may be the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, but it is the beginning of his heavenly reign and the precursor to the initial distribution of salvific benefits.'<sup>370</sup> The author presents the Ascension briefly in his Gospel, the focus being on the apostles and their relationship to the risen Jesus.<sup>371</sup>

This pericope was rightly named 'the doxological description of the Ascension', because it focuses on the blessing of Christ. The narrative in Acts 1 is rather an 'ecclesial' interpretation of the Ascension, which leads the reader towards Luke's understanding of how God's *ekklēsia* must generate a joyous worship and the wish to preach the good news to the end of the earth.<sup>372</sup>

Καὶ αὐτοὶ προσκυνήσαντες αὐτὸν ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης	52 And they, worshipping him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy.
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The Ascension event is seen not as one of sadness, but joy, and as an occasion to praise God.<sup>373</sup> William G. Morrice observes that 'joy plays a large part in the Easter story. The

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city, it was as "the time for his being taken up" was approaching (9:51). The narrative has prepared us for this departure and for its prophetic significance.' Cf. PARSONS 1987: 74-75.

<sup>368</sup> 'It has been suggested that they represent the Law and the Prophets, or figures who have ascended into heaven, or eschatological figures who were expected to return. Any or all of these possibilities may be present in this extraordinarily dense passage.' JOHNSON 1991: 155.

<sup>369</sup> EZEKIEL THE TRAGEDIAN, *Exagoge* 6:5-22; cf. PHILO, *Vit. Mos.* 1:28, JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 3.5.7, *Pseudo-Philo* 32:9.

<sup>370</sup> BOCK 1996: 1945.

<sup>371</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 909.

<sup>372</sup> KARRIS *NJBC* 43:198: 721.

<sup>373</sup> 'Just as this is the first occasion in the gospel when the Lord "lifts his hands" in solemn priestly blessing of his followers, it is likewise the first occasion when they can enter the relationship to him

women at the tomb (Mt 28:8) as well as the disciples in the upper room (Lk 24:41) experienced this emotion when they realised the truth of the resurrection. Not only so; but when they parted company with their risen Lord on his ascension, they returned to the city of Jerusalem “with great *joy*” (Lk 24:52).<sup>374</sup> Here, after receiving the revelation the disciples react, but their worship mentioned here is different from that of the people described in Sir 50.<sup>375</sup> In v. 52 the high point of the entire gospel is reached, because it is the first time where Luke mentions the apostles worshipping Christ (and especially in his absence).<sup>376</sup> The disciples praised the ascended One in the same way in which the Magi once did, at the nativity of Jesus (Matt 2:11).<sup>377</sup>

In the Greek literature the term προσκύνησις is used to describe the veneration of the deities. Zwiep observes that in comparison with the Jewish texts which allude or refer to ascensions ‘adoration of the person taken up to heaven is an element which is absent in the Jewish rapture traditions, for obvious reasons.’<sup>378</sup> The word προσκυνω describes not as much the spoken words as an attitude of the worshipping one. In front of a god or a king, one is expected to react and express his praise through body language, bowing down to the earth in a pious gesture.<sup>379</sup> Lohfink affirms that Luke kept the disciples’ worship until the end of his gospel, which proves that the motif represents an editorial element of the author and an influence of a Hellenistic pattern.<sup>380</sup> However, his arguments are not convincing if we take into account the parallels with Sir 50:20-22 and consider that the evangelist was influenced by this text. The act of worshipping from Lk 24 was influenced rather by Sir 50:21 than by a conventional rapture *topos*.

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which will become the permanent attitude of the Christian church towards its ascended Lord: solemn adoration!’ DILLON 1978: 223-224.

<sup>374</sup> MORRICE 1984: 72.

<sup>375</sup> ‘Doch im Unterschied zu diesem Abschnitt [Sir 50] werfen sich die Jünger hier nicht vor Gott nieder, wie das die Gläubigen tun, die den Segen eines Priesters empfangen haben, sondern – so schreibt Lukas – vor Christus selbst: προσκυνήσαντες αὐτὸν, »nachdem sie vor ihm niedergefallen waren«. Jesus hat die Grenze überschritten, die die Menschen von Gott trennt. Als Folge der Auferstehung kann er göttliche Ehren empfangen.’ BOVON 2009: 619.

<sup>376</sup> KARRIS *NJBC* 43:198: 721.

<sup>377</sup> SABOURIN 1987: 386.

<sup>378</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 93.

<sup>379</sup> ‘Im Mittleren Orient des Altertums gehörte die Proskynese auch zum Hofprotokoll des Königs von Persien und anderer Königreiche. Das Wort gehört also zum Vokabular des Tempels und des Palastes, der Religion und des Hofes.’ BOVON 2009: 619.

<sup>380</sup> LOHFINK 1971:171-174.

The return of the apostles to Jerusalem is linked to the second chapter of the gospel, in which the Virgin Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem to seek Jesus (ὕπεστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ appears only in the paschal narrative – 24:33, 52; and in the childhood narrative – 2:45).<sup>381</sup> However, unlike Lk 2:24 in which Christ is found in Jerusalem, in 24:52 the apostles return to Jerusalem not to seek the ascended One, but out of obedience.<sup>382</sup> Furthermore, Robert J. Karris draws attention on the circular structure of the gospel stating that Jerusalem is both the starting place and the ending place of Luke's first book.<sup>383</sup> Furthermore, Zwiep sees a parallel between the return of the disciples to Jerusalem and the return of Elisha after Elijah's departure (2Kgs 2:12-14).<sup>384</sup> Luke uses here the Semitic form Ἱερουσαλὴμ, alluding to Jerusalem as a religious rather than profane centre.<sup>385</sup> Jerusalem is a place of great importance for Luke, who assigns eschatological function to it in the Ascension narratives, but also a symbolic interpretation of OT prophecies.<sup>386</sup>

The return in the state of joy is related to the Christ's recognition as God and to the sight of his Ascension. 'It is difficult to explain this "great joy" if the recognition implied in vv. 51b, 52a is omitted, because *diestē*, "was parted", would then stand unexplained and it would mean no more that that he "vanished" from them, as in v. 31c. So, internal reasons support the external evidence for the originality of vv. 51b, 52a in the Lukan text.'<sup>387</sup> From Bethany (or its vicinity) 'the apostles, now filled with *great joy*, go back to Jerusalem announcing to it the message of the Lord's blessing. It is only then that blessing is rendered back to God in the temple itself, in fulfilment of the prophecies uttered by Zechariah (1:62), a temple priest, and Simeon (2:28).<sup>388</sup> Similarly, in the same joyous tone, the Gospel according to Matthew ends: 'and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.'<sup>389</sup> The Ascension, as also the birth described in the

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<sup>381</sup> STERLING 1992: 332.

<sup>382</sup> PARSONS 1987: 75.

<sup>383</sup> KARRIS *NJBC* 43:198: 721.

<sup>384</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 93.

<sup>385</sup> 'Der Evangelist, der, um die Hauptstadt zu nennen, manchmal die sakrale und manchmal die profane Form braucht, wählt hier die religiöse und semitische Form Ἱερουσαλὴμ. Das konkrete Leben der Jünger bleibt vom Glauben gekennzeichnet.' BOVON 2009: 619.

<sup>386</sup> 'It is impossible to miss the importance of Jerusalem and the fulfilment of the OT for Luke. All of the major saving events of Jesus happen in Jerusalem. Luke wants to make it unmistakably clear that Jesus is the fulfilment of Judaism and Jewish hope.' WENHAM 2005: 91.

<sup>387</sup> FITZMYER 1985: 1590-1591; cf. METZGER 1994: 163.

<sup>388</sup> TARAZI 2001: 184

<sup>389</sup> BOVON 2009: 620.



beginning of the gospel, is an occasion for joy.<sup>390</sup> Also, through the Lord's departure the promise of sending the Spirit can be fulfilled, which constitutes a reason for great joy for the apostles. Leo the Great, interpreting the apostles' joy, said: 'It was certainly a great and indescribable source of joy when, in the sight of the heavenly multitudes, the nature of our human race ascended over the dignity of all heavenly creatures. It passed the angelic orders and was raised beyond the heights of archangels. In its ascension, our human race did not stop at any other height until this same nature was received at the seat of the eternal Father. Our human nature, united with the divinity of the Son, was on the throne of his glory. The ascension of Christ is our elevation.'<sup>391</sup>

καὶ ἦσαν διὰ παντὸς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν.	53 And (they) were continually in the temple (praising and) blessing God. [Amen.]
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In the last verse of the gospel, Luke describes the presence of the apostles in the temple, praising God. The term ἱερῷ – neuter noun in the dative of the form ἱερόν – translates as sanctuary, temple.<sup>392</sup> This word is used to designate the temple building or the temple as place of worship. Τὸ ἱερόν is found in the NT 61 times (9 times in Mark, 11 times in Matthew, 14 times in Luke, 15 times in Acts, 11 times in John and only once in the Pauline epistles).<sup>393</sup> In Lk 24:53 it is ἱερόν and not ναός, which denotes that fact that the disciples and their companions were not members of the clergy.<sup>394</sup> The term ἱερόν is translated by the biblical dictionaries as referring to the entire Temple complex (the Sanhedrin, the Temple court and buildings), the Temple itself being represented by ναός.<sup>395</sup> Subsequently, the words διὰ παντὸς suggest more than the mere attending at the usual hours of prayer in the Temple, but a continuous communion with God.<sup>396</sup> In the early period, for the Jerusalem Christians the Temple was a place of regular worship and prayer (cf. Acts 22:17), but the emphasis is on the necessity of prayer rather than on the place of worship.<sup>397</sup>

<sup>390</sup> MARSHALL 1985: 910.

<sup>391</sup> LEO THE GREAT, *Sermon* 73.3-4, in JUST 2003: 393.

<sup>392</sup> NEWMAN 1971: 85; THAYER 1889: 298-299.

<sup>393</sup> BAUER 1988: 756-757. The frequency of the expression in Luke's gospel and Acts shows the predominancy of the sacred place of prayer theme in Lukan writings.

<sup>394</sup> Cf. BOVON 2009: 620.

<sup>395</sup> Cf. MIRCEA 1995: 520-522.

<sup>396</sup> FITZMYER 1985: 1591.

<sup>397</sup> FALK 1995: 270.

The Gospel action begins in the Temple (1:8) and ends in the Temple,<sup>398</sup> ‘which, for Luke, is the bond of continuity between old and new.’<sup>399</sup> According to Tarazi, this Temple – seen as the place of prayer and action of the Holy Spirit in the Heavenly Jerusalem – is located in an eschatological Jerusalem.<sup>400</sup> The Temple is no longer the only possible sacred space and it is not going to be the site for sacrifice anymore, but that of prayer, and in its premises the mission of the disciples will commence (Acts 3:12-26).<sup>401</sup> Furthermore, the apostles’ presence in the temple signifies also their faithfulness and belief.<sup>402</sup> I. Howard Marshall stresses that ‘with the ascension the Gospel reaches its climax. What began in the temple concludes in the temple, with praise to God, and the path of Jesus now reaches its goal. The programme has been established for the second volume of Luke’s work in which the church will obey the command of the risen Jesus to take the gospel to all the nations.’<sup>403</sup>

From here on, the narration will be continued in Luke’s second writing, the Book of Acts. ‘Luke underlines the *heilsgeschichtliche* continuity of the early Christian community with Israel and prepares his Gentile readership for his presentation in Acts 1-5 of the Jerusalem Church as not yet emancipated from Judaism (cf. Acts 2:46-37; 3:1; 5:42).’<sup>404</sup>

In the Byzantine text and, implicitly, in the Orthodox translations, Luke’s Gospel ends with a final *Amen* which proves the usage of the text as part of the ecclesial ritual. The term is a liturgical interpolation and is missing from the oldest and most representative biblical manuscripts.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> JOHNSON 1991: 404; TYSON 2006: 106; PARSONS 2007: 150.

<sup>399</sup> KARRIS *NJBC* 43:198: 721.

<sup>400</sup> TARAIZI 2001: 184: ‘This temple, renewed and filled with the eschatological joy brought about by the Spirit offered in the Gospel, is the place of prayer of the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the Jerusalem to which the Romans will be drawn by God, not the earthly one they come to destroy but the heavenly one where they will worship him in its light. The book of Acts picks up this story where Luke leaves off, in the renewed Jerusalem.’

<sup>401</sup> BOVON 2009: 620; DILLON 1978: 224-225.

<sup>402</sup> ‘Moreover in Acts 1:14 Luke takes care to show that after the ascension of the Lord the mother and brothers, along with the Twelve and the women, were still faithful, awaiting the coming of the Spirit.’ BROWN 1994: 132.

<sup>403</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 908.

<sup>404</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 94.

<sup>405</sup> ‘The word ἀμήν, which is absent from the earliest and best representatives of both the Alexandrian and the Western types of text, is a liturgical addition introduced by copyists.’ METZGER 1994: 164.

The last verses of the Gospel present as a narrative the last moments of the Saviour's physical presence on Earth and the end of his mission to preach the Gospel. These verses function as an epilogue used by Luke to shift to his second book, the Acts. The Ascension is the central theme of this fragment and is described into more detail in the Book of Acts. In the Gospel, the author is contented to conclude with an image of prayer and gathering of the apostolic community. Generally, the historicity of the Ascension event is not contested (at least in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions), yet it is difficult to understand the event merely by means of its description in the Gospel. The Ascension is clearly different from the Saviour's appearances and disappearances following the resurrection (cf. Lk 24:31); it definitely represents the end of a chapter and the beginning of a new one. By this, it becomes obvious that Christ's earthly mission is concluded, while that of the apostles is about to start. As Zwiep affirms, 'the ascension, in other words, rounds off an era in salvation history. This closing function is most prominent in Lk 24. In Acts 1 the perspective broadens in that the ascension opens up a new period, the period of the Church.'<sup>406</sup>

On the discussion regarding the nature of the ascended body, Aristotle thought of two different types of bodies: simple (being the four natural elements: water, earth, air and fire) and compound. The transcendent nature of the second (the human body) determines this movement.<sup>407</sup> Jesus' body, however, cannot be regarded either as only physical or spiritual. Pervo suggested that his 'body was not, to be sure, subject to ordinary limitations. It could assume different forms (Luke 24:15-16) and appear or disappear at will (24:31, 36), but it was capable of being touched and of taking nourishment (Luke 24:36-43; cf. Acts 1:4).'<sup>408</sup> The patristic theologians understand the Ascension as an elevation to the Heavens of Christ's humanity and, with it, an elevation

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<sup>406</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 171.

<sup>407</sup> 'Die einfachen Körper haben einen naturgemäßen Ursprung ihrer Bewegung im eigentlichen Sinne. So kommt es den „schweren“ Elemente Wasser und Erde zu, sich nach unten (zur Mitte hin) zu bewegen, den „leichten“ Elementen Luft und Feuer dagegen, nach oben aufzusteigen, bis sie jeweils ihren „natürlichen Ort“ erreicht haben. Die vier Elemente führen damit allesamt eine geradelinige Bewegung aus, nicht etwa eine kreisförmige... Dieser erste, ewige Körper ist nach Aristoteles dort anzusiedeln, wo die Menschen seit jeher den Ort des Göttlichen und Unsterblichen ausgemacht haben, nämlich im Himmel... Die gemischten Körper richten sich in ihrer Bewegung nach demjenigen einfachen Körper, der in ihrer Zusammensetzung überwiegt. So sind ihre natürlichen Orte irgendwo zwischen den natürlichen Orten der nach unten und oben strebenden Elemente zu suchen: auf der Oberfläche der Erde oder im himmlischen Bereich unter dem Mond.' MARSCHLER 2003: 631-632.

<sup>408</sup> PERVO 2009: 45.

of the whole restored and deified human nature (the doctrine of *theōsis*).<sup>409</sup> In his commentary on Luke's Gospel, Cyril of Alexandria records that Christ, 'having blessed them and gone ahead a little, he was carried up into heaven so that he might share the Father's throne even with the flesh that was united to him.'<sup>410</sup> Comparatively, John Damascene, in his explanation of Christ's bodily Ascension, says that 'the Ascension from earth into heavens and his descent back are activities of a circumcised body'.<sup>411</sup>

Dumitru Stăniloae, referring to the event of the Ascension, writes: 'According to the NT, Christ elevates his humanity to the fullness of power through which he acts upon us, by means of the four successive moments: his descent into hell, his bodily resurrection, his Ascension into heavens and his sitting at the right of the Father. The Ascension into heaven and the sitting at the right of the Father represent the complete pneumatisation and deification of his human body, its full comprising with the divine infinity, its absolute elevation to the state of a transparent medium to the infinite love of God in its action towards us. Undoubtedly, this doesn't also imply the melting of Christ's body into divine infinity.'<sup>412</sup> Constantin Preda wrote that 'the novelty of the life to which the resurrected Christ elevated the human nature he had assumed through his Incarnation will only be manifested after his Ascension into glory.'<sup>413</sup>

The Ascension must be understood as a theandric action, a real act of ascension, not only spiritually, but especially physically.<sup>414</sup> Through the Ascension, the Saviour's human nature is not absorbed by the Divine one, as argued by some Western commentators<sup>415</sup>; instead, human nature is deified, it is fulfilled. Referring to the deifying effect of the Ascension, Dumitru Stăniloae said that Christ 'proved by it [his Ascension] that that he ascends precisely as a human being, so that he sits on the throne as Master over everything (to the right of the Father). He ascends from the humility to which he lowered himself. But he also elevates his own humanity, without breaking the

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<sup>409</sup> 'He was now returning to the throne of his Father's glory with the conquered mortal nature that he had taken. How sweet were the tears that they poured out when they were burning with lively hope and gladness over the prospect of their own entry into the heavenly fatherland! They knew that their God and Lord was now bringing there part of their own nature! Such a sight rightly restored them! Then they worshipped in the place where his feet stood.' BEDE, *Homilies on the Gospels* II.15, in JUST 2001: 393.

<sup>410</sup> CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentary on Luke* 24, in JUST 2001: 392.

<sup>411</sup> IOAN DAMASCHIN, *Dogmatica*, in FECIORU 1993: 147.

<sup>412</sup> STĂNILOAE 1978: 184.

<sup>413</sup> PEDA 2005: 64.

<sup>414</sup> MORRIS 1988.1: 375; cf. MOULE 1956-1957: 209.

<sup>415</sup> Cf. FITZMYER 1998: 265-295; ZWIEP 1997: 80-86.

bond with those he wants to make understand and live his own state, elevated to this supreme glory of his kingdom.’<sup>416</sup>

The liturgical tradition of the Eastern Church is permeated by the joy and optimism of this understanding of the Ascension. The Kontakion<sup>417</sup> of the Ascension emphasises the mystical significance of the event. Through his Ascension into glory, Christ brings together the Heavens and Earth – ‘You fulfilled God’s plan for us, / uniting things earthly and heavenly, / and ascended in glory, Christ our God, / to the heavens you never left. / Yet you are not far from us, / for you cry out to those who love you, / I am with you, and no one is against you.’<sup>418</sup>

### 3.2 The Ascension in the Book of Acts (1:9-11)

In the introduction of his second book (Acts 1:1-2) Luke briefly describes the content of his first: the incarnated Saviour’s activity until the moment of his Ascension up to Heavens. Zwiep notes that the assertion to have included *all* the Saviour’s acts and teachings (πάντων) is characteristically Lukan.<sup>419</sup> In v. 2 the author mentions the Ascension as the final scene described in the Gospel.

In Acts 1:6-11 a more detailed narration of the Ascension is given. Christ gives the apostles the final instructions (1:6-7) and, indirectly, the commandment to spread is Gospel ‘to the end of the earth’ (ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς). He also promises to send down the Holy Spirit, and these are his final words before the Ascension (1:8). Apart from the

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<sup>416</sup> STĂNILOAE 1991: 279.

<sup>417</sup> Also known as *kondakion*, *kondak* or *kontak*, the Kontakion is a type of hymn used in the Eastern Orthodox Churches’ liturgical cult. The first kontakion appears to be the ‘Kontakion of the Nativity’ written by Romanos the Melodist (485-555). ‘Romanos’ works are essentially long metrical homilies, arranged in stanzaic form, set to music and designed to be presented after the scriptural readings that are part of the morning prayers in the Eastern Church. Although specific information about the actual performance of these works is lacking, they were presumably chanted by a cantor – perhaps the Melodist himself – on important feasts... The poems of Romanos, are, in every sense of the words, sung sermons.’ SCHORK 1995: 6.

<sup>418</sup> ROMANOS THE MELODIST, *Kontakion of the Ascension*, cited by WYBREW 2001: 87. The last phrase (‘I am with you, and no one is against you’) is the refrain which appears after each stanza (or *ikos*).

<sup>419</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 95: ‘It is quite suggestive that in comparison with his sources Luke’s presentation is more comprehensive than that of his predecessors. Beyond Mark and Q, e.g., Luke recounts the birth, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. Although, strictly speaking, none of these events can be said to be “acts and teachings” of Jesus, they lend some weight to the suggestion that πάντων is more than only a rhetorical device.’

information in Lk 24, in vv. 3-8 the author describes the events that took place during the forty days from the resurrection to Ascension.<sup>420</sup> Augustine interprets that ‘it is not meant, however, that they had eaten and drunk with him daily throughout these forty days. For that would be contrary to John’s statement, who has interposed the space of eight days, during which He was not seen, and makes His third appearance take place by the sea of Tiberias. At the same time, even although he [should be supposed to have] manifested himself to them and lived with them every day after that period, that would not come into antagonism with anything in the narrative.’<sup>421</sup>

The narration in Acts 1 ends with the apparition of two men dressed in white garments passing on to Christ’s witnesses the promise of the second coming of the ascended one. Judging from its form, Lohfink divides the Ascension narration in two parts: the Ascension (v. 9) and the occurrence of the Angels (v. 10-11)<sup>422</sup>, but this is not the only possible classification.

Pervo regards this section (1:6-11) as the first episode in the Book of Acts. ‘The first episode in Acts is narrated from the viewpoint of the apostles. Readers are not immediately aware that these verses constitute a distinct episode, and its location is revealed only at its close (v. 12).’<sup>423</sup> Structurally, the pericope (Acts 1:6-11) is made up of three units, with the Ascension description in v. 9 as its centre.<sup>424</sup>

The most obvious parallel or model of Luke’s description is Elijah’s ascension narrative (2Kgs 2:1-14; Sir 48:9-12), because it underlines the theme of succession.<sup>425</sup> Another model could be Moses who, from the author’s perspective, represents a prototype of Christ.<sup>426</sup> But the fact that this description belongs to Luke is never doubted.<sup>427</sup> The verses have specifically Lukan elements, as proof that this is a tradition of the

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<sup>420</sup> JERVELL 1998: 116.

<sup>421</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Harmony of the Gospels* 3.25.84, *NPNF* 1.6: 224.

<sup>422</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 158-159.

<sup>423</sup> PERVO 2009: 41.

<sup>424</sup> The structure of the entire fragment can be divided as: A (v. 7), B (v. 8), C (v. 9), A’ (v. 10a), B’ (vv. 10b-11). Cf. PERVO 2009: 41: ‘This apophthegmatic “sandwich” establishes the meaning of the ascension and sets out the future program [sic!], which rejects both political messianism and imminent expectation in favour of vigorous mission.’

<sup>425</sup> PERVO 2009: 45-46.

<sup>426</sup> ‘Moses has to leave in order for Joshua to work with his prophetic spirit (Deut 34:9); Elijah had to depart in order for Elisha to gain a double portion of his prophetic spirit (2Kgs 2:9)... There is good reason to think that they imaginatively represent Jesus’ prophetic predecessors who ascended, Moses and Elijah.’ JOHNSON 1992:31.

<sup>427</sup> Cf. PESCH 1986: 72.

Ascension that was taken over and edited by the author.<sup>428</sup> Richard J. Dillon writes that Luke took over from the early Christian communities the idea that Christ's preaching and earthly ministry is 'the climax of Israel's colourful tradition of charismatic prophecy'.<sup>429</sup>

Καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν βλέπόντων αὐτῶν ἐπλήρθη καὶ νεφέλῃ ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν.	9 And saying this, while they were looking on, he was lifted up and he was taken up by a cloud out of their eyes.
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The description of the Ascension event starts in v. 9 and is related to the preceding scene through the words ταῦτα εἰπὼν. The verse has a chiasmic structure A-B-B'-A':

- A βλέπόντων αὐτῶν (they were looking on),
- B ἐπλήρθη (he was lifted up),
- καὶ (and),
- B' νεφέλῃ ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν (he was taken up by a cloud),
- A' ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν (out of their eyes).<sup>430</sup>

On the basis of some manuscripts<sup>431</sup>, J.H. Ropes argues that εἰπὼν βλέπόντων should be omitted because the words are uselessly making the sentence more difficult.<sup>432</sup> Nevertheless, his argument is not strong enough and does not reflect the author's intention to underline the fact that the apostles *saw* Christ's Ascension.<sup>433</sup> As in 2 Kings 2, the entire focus of the scene falls on the topic of *seeing*.<sup>434</sup> In this way, those present at the Christ's Ascension become 'eye-witnesses.' John Chrysostom makes this comment regarding the theme of *seeing*: 'Not "while they beheld" did he rise from the dead, but "while they beheld, he was taken up." Inasmuch, however, as the sight of their

<sup>428</sup> 'Luke is probably writing up in his own way and to suit his own concerns a piece of traditional material (though tradition that was neither old nor widespread, since narratives of the Ascension are not to be found elsewhere in the NT).' BARRETT 1994: 81; cf. MUNCK 1967: p. 7.

<sup>429</sup> DILLON *NJBC* 44:17: 728.

<sup>430</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 103.

<sup>431</sup> Among the MSS that omit these words the most important is Codex Bezae (D). Cf. RIUS-CAMPS; READ-HEIMERDINGER 2004: 48. Also, a list of the MSS from which the words βλέπόντων αὐτῶν are omitted, see: BRUCE 1952: 71.

<sup>432</sup> Cited by BARRETT 1994: 81.

<sup>433</sup> Cf. PERVO 2009: 40.

<sup>434</sup> 'Die Sichtbarkeit der Entrückung Jesu – und entsprechend der künftigen Parusie (vgl. schon Lk 21:27) – ist durch die Häufung der Verben des Sehens (9: βλέπόντων; 10: ἀτενίζοντες; 11: [ἐμ]βλέποντες – ἐθεάσασθε) und die Wendung »von ihren Augen« (v. 9) betont; vermutlich hat sich Lukas an Entrückungstraditionen (vgl. 4Kön 2; Sir 48) orientiert.' PESCH 1986: 72; cf. ZWIEP 1997: 106.

eyes even here was not all-sufficient; for in the resurrection they saw the end, but not the beginning, and in the Ascension they saw the beginning, but not the end.’<sup>435</sup>

The interpretation of the Ascension in v. 9 through ἐπήρθη – verb, indicative aorist passive, third person singular of ἐπαίρω – presents the image of a concrete event. The term is translated: *raise, lift up, hoist*.<sup>436</sup> As Stempvoort underlines, ‘this realism is typical of Luke; see Luke 24:36f. This realistic line runs on in the meaning of ὑπολαμβάνω. The traditional translation of this verb is usually mystical: “a cloud took him out of sight” (Moffatt); “a cloud closing beneath him hid him from their sight” (Weymouth).’<sup>437</sup> The Ascension takes place ‘as they were looking on’ and the author emphasizes the idea that the witnesses saw the entire scene. τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν is a metonymy replacing the words ‘their eyes’.<sup>438</sup>

Parsons makes a comparison between the terminology of different ascensions in Greek, Roman and Jewish literature, and the one used in Acts 1, and concludes, writing that: ‘The ascension of Jesus in Acts more closely resembles the Greco-Roman literature in terms of characteristic features – clouds, angels, and mountains seem to play a more significant role in the pagan texts than in the Jewish literature. The Lukan terminology, on the other hand, is much closer to the Jewish literature, particularly the Elijah texts.’<sup>439</sup> In his commentary to the Book of Acts, David J. Williams states that ‘because the Jews thought of heaven as *above* and the earth as *below*, the movement of Jesus from the visible to the invisible world is expressed in terms of his going *up*.’<sup>440</sup> Still, this interpretation is limited and does not express St Luke’s intention and the theological meaning of the Ascension event.

The *cloud* theme has several meanings; it has been interpreted as a natural cloud by naturalists, as a cloud of Divine presence,<sup>441</sup> while others link this passage to the clouds of Christ’s Second Coming (Dan 7:13).<sup>442</sup> Jacob Jervell understands the cloud as vehicle

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<sup>435</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Acts* 2, NPNF 1.11: 13.

<sup>436</sup> Cf. NEWMAN 1971: 65; THAYER 1889: 227-228.

<sup>437</sup> STEMPOORT 1959: 37.

<sup>438</sup> CULY; PARSONS 2003: 9-10.

<sup>439</sup> PARSONS 1987: 140.

<sup>440</sup> WILLIAMS 1990: 24.

<sup>441</sup> PESCH 1986: 73.

<sup>442</sup> PERVO 2009: 46 n. 47; cf. ZWIEP 1997: 105.



of the Ascension, yet without rejecting the possibility of a theophany.<sup>443</sup> Stempvoort notes that both the Greeks and the Jews interpreted the presence of a cloud as indication of a ‘supernatural rapture,’<sup>444</sup> and for Sabin Verzan the cloud is a symbol of the Divine presence. ‘The cloud is part of both the OT (Exod 13:22) and the NT (Lk 9:34-35) theophanies. It will also be a feature of the second coming of the Son of Man (Matt 24:30; cf. I Thess 4:17; Rev. 1:7; etc.).’<sup>445</sup> Zwiep explains what must be understood by the idea that the cloud expresses a theophany, writing that such an interpretation is ‘clearly not that the ascending Jesus was deified! Rather God manifested his special presence at the ascension of Jesus.’<sup>446</sup> Referring to the presence of the cloud in the description of the Ascension, Lohfink argues that it has a double function, both as an epiphany cloud (through which God makes visible His presence), and as an Ascension cloud (as a vehicle for Christ’s return to the Father), drawing a comparison with the cloud of the Transfiguration scene, in the presence of Moses and Elijah.<sup>447</sup> On the other hand, Joseph Rius-Camps and Jenny Read-Heimerdinger, in their analyses of the text of Codex D, consider that the function of the cloud in the Ascension scene is to separate the divine kingdom from the earthly world.<sup>448</sup> This is how the Christian poet Arator understands the presence of the cloud: ‘in his honour as he comes, a star does service as a soldier, going before the Magi; a cloud waits upon him in obedience as he goes.’<sup>449</sup>, while Bede writes that ‘everywhere creation offers obedient service to its Creator. The stars indicated his birth; clouds overshadowed him in his suffering, received him in his ascension, and they will accompany him when he returns for the judgement.’<sup>450</sup>

The Ascension was probably witnessed only by the eleven apostles, as the author gives no indication regarding the presence of anyone else.<sup>451</sup> Nevertheless, in Church Tradition, confirmed by iconography, apart from the apostles, the Ascension was also

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<sup>443</sup> JERVELL 1998: 116-117.

<sup>444</sup> STEMVOORT 1959: 38.

<sup>445</sup> VERZAN 1994: 32. In a similar way, John Chrysostom sees the cloud as a symbol of heaven and divine power. CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Acts*, NPNF 1.11: 13.

<sup>446</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 105.

<sup>447</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 191.

<sup>448</sup> RIUS-CAMPS; READ-HEIMERDINGER 2004: 89.

<sup>449</sup> ARATOR, *De Actibus Apostolorum* 1, in SCHRADER 1987: 26.

<sup>450</sup> BEDE, *Commentary on Acts* 1:9b, cited by MARTIN 2006: 11.

<sup>451</sup> ‘At the act of the Ascension, a glorification act, an act of the royal power of the Lord, only the apostles were present’ VERZAN 1994: 32.

witnessed by Mary, the mother of God,<sup>452</sup> and Parsons opines that ‘the disciples seem to include a larger group than just the apostles.’<sup>453</sup>

καὶ ὥς ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν πορευομένου αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο παρειστήκεισαν αὐτοῖς ἐν ἐσθήσεσι λευκαῖς,	10 And while they were looking, while He was going to the sky, behold, two men stood beside them in white garments,
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And while the witnesses look at Christ ascending, two angels suddenly appear by the apostles.<sup>454</sup> The periphrastic construction ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν, present in classical Greek literature, is used here with the same meaning and F.F. Bruce observes that the frequency of the notion of ἀτενίζω in Lukan writings may explain its use based on the medical literature.<sup>455</sup> Luke gets the readers’ attention using the word ἰδοὺ and then goes on by introducing a surprise element.<sup>456</sup> καὶ ἰδοὺ seems to be taken from LXX and does not represent a translation from a Semitic source.<sup>457</sup>

The apparition of the two men clothed in white, interpreted as two angels, parallels the apparition of the two angels who showed themselves to the myrrh-bearing women at Christ’s tomb, bringing them the joy of the resurrection (Lk 24:4). The colour of their clothes (ἐσθήσεσι) is, according to Barrett, the author’s indication regarding the identity of the two.<sup>458</sup> Pervo sees in the angels theme a linking element between the resurrection and the Ascension used by Luke in order to express the unity of the two events.<sup>459</sup> Without any doubt, by using the scene of the angels’ apparition, the author also had the intention to include one more supernatural element in his description, as a reference to the Kingdom of God.

Jean Danielou writes that ‘if the mystery of the Nativity inaugurates the work of Christ, that of the Ascension completes it. Just as the angels were entrusted with the secrets of the first, they are the open admirers of the second, after having assisted Christ

<sup>452</sup> WYBREW 2001: 83-84.

<sup>453</sup> PARSONS 1987: 270 n. 25.

<sup>454</sup> The apparition of the two angels takes place at *that* time, as BARRETT (1994: 82) observes: ‘The temporal ὥς shows that ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν is a periphrastic imperfect: As they were gazing.’

<sup>455</sup> ‘Ἀτενίζω, a favourite word of Luke, who is responsible for 12 out of its 14 NT occurrences, “is used by the medical writers to denote a peculiar fixed look”.’ BRUCE 1952: 71.

<sup>456</sup> Cf. CULY; PARSONS 2003: 10.

<sup>457</sup> BARRETT 1994: 82; cf. BRUCE 1952: 71.

<sup>458</sup> cf. 2Macc 11:8; Mark 9:3; 16:5; Jn 20:12; Hermas, *Vis.* 2:1; 3:5; *Sim.* 8.2.3. BARRETT 1994: 83.

<sup>459</sup> PERVO 2009: 46.

throughout the interval which separated these two events, from the temptation to the resurrection.<sup>460</sup> Although in Acts 1 it is only the presence of the Angels that is mentioned, Orthodox Tradition visually represents them in its iconography as joining Christ in his Ascension to Heaven.<sup>461</sup> This image of the presence and mission of the angels is to be found in *popular* (apocryphal) Christian writings, like the *Ascension of Isaiah* (3:15) or the *Gospel of Peter* (40-43). In his commentary on the Psalms, Eusebius of Caesarea described the Ascension as follows: ‘the Virtues of heaven seeing Him begin to rise, surrounded Him to form His escort, proclaiming His Ascension as they cried, “Rise up, gates everlasting, and the King of Glory will enter”. These things were accomplished in what the Acts record for us...’<sup>462</sup> Psalm 24, which is quoted here by Eusebius, together with Psalm 110, seems to have been traditionally used in reference to the event of the Ascension.<sup>463</sup> The tradition of such an interpretation of Psalm 24, as referring to the Ascension, is already attested from the apostolic period.<sup>464</sup>

The cloud and the two men are elements also present in the scene of the Transfiguration (Lk 9:30; Mark 9:4, 7) when the two men are identified with Moses and Elijah.<sup>465</sup> Just as Zwiep writes, ‘they are *angeli interpretes* (cf. Acts 10:30, 1 En 19:1; 22:3; 23:4; Rev 10:9; 19:9-10; 22:8; cf. 1 Thess 4:17), rather than Moses and Elijah (if they were in the view, Luke would probably have given their names, as he did in Lk 9:30).’<sup>466</sup> The same idea is also backed by Jaroslav Pelikan in his commentary to the Book of Acts, making a comparison with the two angels who appear at the scene of the empty Tomb in Lk 24:4.<sup>467</sup> Despite this, based on the descriptions in Lk 9:30 and 24:4, Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger argue that by the ‘two men in white robes’ Luke described the two

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<sup>460</sup> DANIELOU 1957: 34.

<sup>461</sup> OUSPENSKY; LOSSKY 1982: 194-199. SABBE (1991: 168-169) observes that the iconographical tradition of the Ascension is inspired by the figure of Moses on Mount Sinai.

<sup>462</sup> EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Comentary on Psalms* 17, cited by DANIELOU 1957: 35.

<sup>463</sup> JUSTIN MARTYR, in his *Dialogues* 36.5 (in FALLS 2003: 57), writes that ‘when our Christ arose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the heavenly princes chosen by God were ordered *to open the gates of heaven that the King of Glory might enter*, and, after arising, *sit at the right hand of the Father until he makes his enemies his footstool* (as it is stated in another psalm [Ps 110.1]).

<sup>464</sup> DANIELOU 1957: 39: ‘But Justin is the first to develop the dialogue between the angels of heaven who do not recognise the Word made Flesh and the angels of earth who reveal His identity.’

<sup>465</sup> Cf. DILLON *NJBC* 44:17: 728.

<sup>466</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 106. JOHNSON (1992: 31) does not exclude the idea that by the two men Moses and Elijah would be described.

<sup>467</sup> PELIKAN 2005: 41.

central figures of the Jewish Tradition concerning the ascension, Moses and Elijah, and not two angels.<sup>468</sup>

Jervell sees the apparition of the angels as a necessity because the apostles, gazing to the skies and witnessing the Ascension, were not able to understand what had happened. This is why the angels are seen as interpreters of the scene in v. 11.<sup>469</sup> One can notice the greater attention given by the author to the apostles' expectations when compared to the Ascension itself.<sup>470</sup>

The Saviour's bodily Ascension into heaven was affirmed by Luke and confirmed by the Tradition of the Church already in the first centuries. Nevertheless, some commentators of the Scripture believe that the Ascension is not a historical event and that Luke's descriptions are to be understood in connection with the pagan tradition of raptures into the sky of the heroes of the ancient world. Thus, Rudolf Pesch argues that, as far as Luke's description is concerned, although it involves the event of Jesus' Ascension, it cannot be considered a historical event.<sup>471</sup>

οἱ καὶ εἶπαν· ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι, τί ἐστήκατε [ἐμ]βλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀναλημφθεὶς ἀφ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν οὕτως ἐλεύσεται ὡς τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.	11 and they said: Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into the sky, will come in the same way you have seen him going into the sky.
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The phrase εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν is used four times in vv. 10-11; the third usage is missing from Codex D and others, but it has been agreed that its omission happened accidentally and does not constitute an interpolation.<sup>472</sup> Sleeman makes an analysis of the frequency of this expression in the Ascension description and concludes that: 'While not unprecedented elsewhere in the narrative, such tight repetition functions as an important

<sup>468</sup> RIUS-CAMPS; READ-HEIMERDINGER, *The Message of Acts in Codex Bezae*, 1, pp. 89-90.

<sup>469</sup> JERVELL, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, p. 117.

<sup>470</sup> RIUS-CAMPS; READ-HEIMERDINGER 2004: 89.

<sup>471</sup> 'Insofern Lukas aber mit seiner Erzählung tatsächlich ein Geschehen an Jesus im Auge hat, meint er dessen Erhöhung, und diese wiederum ist kein historisches Ereignis... Das sichtbare »Wunder« ist weder ein leeres Grab noch ein wie eine Rakete zum Himmel fahrender Mensch, sondern die von Jesus gestiftete einmütige Versammlung (1:14) selbst, in der alle, die glauben und nicht zweifeln, ihren erhöhten Herrn »schauen«, der unsichtbar in ihrer Mitte real-präsent ist und durch seinen Geist alle miteinander verbindet.' PESCH 1986: 75.

<sup>472</sup> METZGER 1994: 245.

way in which Luke signals spatial-theological information within Acts.<sup>473</sup> Ἄνδρες (noun, in the vocative) is used in Acts 29 times as a formal formula to begin a discourse<sup>474</sup> and is also employed in Hebrew, yet never in the vocative.<sup>475</sup> The disciples are named Γαλιλαῖοι because of their origin but, according to Pervo, also in order to geographically set the place where their mission begins.<sup>476</sup> Also, Galilee is an important place in the scenes of the Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Lk 23:5, 49, 55; 24:6; Acts 13:31).

The disciples were left gazing into the skies without having understood the great mystery of the Ascension. The purpose of the angels is to explain to the disciples what had happened and to elucidate their ambiguities regarding Christ's second coming.<sup>477</sup> Bede explains that there are two reasons for the apparition of the angels, so as to soothe the apostles and to confirm Christ's Ascension and his coming again.<sup>478</sup> The words of the angels οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς are not meant to reveal the identity of the ascended one (the disciples knew Jesus), but to attest the fact that the same one will come again at the Parousia.<sup>479</sup> 'The angelic words are then an affirmation that Jesus *will* come back, but not right now. At any rate, it is clear that Luke wanted to say more than was possible.'<sup>480</sup> The question τί ἐστήκατε [ἐμ]βλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν implies that the waiting state of the apostles was wrong: 'the apostles should proceed to the tasks that have been assigned to them. This is against Cullmann's argument that Luke believed that only a short time would intervene between Ascension and Parousia.'<sup>481</sup> Luke tries to address the issue of waiting for an immediate return of the Saviour because the early Christian community waited for Christ to return not after a long time.<sup>482</sup>

The apostles witnessed Christ's *bodily* Ascension, seeing him ascending from the ground with the same body he was resurrected with. Augustine explains this idea thus: 'How did they see him go? In the flesh which they touched, which they felt, the scars of

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<sup>473</sup> SLEEMAN 2009: 74.

<sup>474</sup> Cf. CULY; PARSONS 2003: 11.

<sup>475</sup> BARRETT 1994: 83.

<sup>476</sup> PERVO 2009: 46 n. 48. JERVELL (1998: 117) considers that the author named the Apostles 'men of Galilee' because they followed Christ from Galilee to Jerusalem.

<sup>477</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 107.

<sup>478</sup> BEDE, *Commentary on Acts* 1:11a, ACCS – NT 5: 11.

<sup>479</sup> PESCH 1986:74; PERVO 2009: 46.

<sup>480</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 107.

<sup>481</sup> BARRETT 1994: 84.

<sup>482</sup> JERVELL 1996: 112.

which they even probed by touching; in that body in which he went in and out with them for forty days, manifesting himself to them in truth, not in any falsity; not as apparition, not as a shadow, not as a spirit, but as he himself said, not deceiving, “Handle and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see me to have”.<sup>483</sup>

The author makes reference to the Parousia, a remark with a double function to confirm to the disciples that Christ physically left (that his disappearance is final and that he will no longer show himself to them) and to make them understand the responsibility given to them by the Saviour himself (that of having to preach the Gospel ‘to the end of the earth’, Acts 1:8). In order to fulfil Christ’s commandment, the disciples must first receive the Holy Spirit. In his interpretation of this, Johnson writes that ‘we know that they will also receive the promised Spirit. But to do so, they must obey the command to return to the city and await that empowerment.’<sup>484</sup> Lohfink understands the Ascension as a forecast of the Parousia and, thus, the end of Jesus’ earthly existence anticipates the end of his Church.<sup>485</sup> Regarding the day when the ascended Christ will return, Pelikan notes that ‘the language of the prophets speaks of “the day of his coming” (ἡμέραν εἰσόδου αὐτοῦ) (Mal 3:2 LXX) in the singular, as though there were only one coming. This has compelled the exegetes of the church to distinguish between the “first coming”, in which the prophecy of Isaiah about the suffering servant (Isa 53) had already been fulfilled, and the “second coming”, prior to which the prophecy of Isaiah about the wolf and the lamb feeding together (Isa 65:25) would not be fulfilled, and to assign the various prophecies to one or the other of these.’<sup>486</sup> This passage is one of the few in the book of Acts making reference to the Parousia (cf. 3:20 ff.; 10:42; 17:31; 23:6; 24:25). As Serge Ruzer observes, ‘the redemption is thus postponed, but not without good reason, and in due time Jesus will return to restore the kingdom to Israel as expected.’<sup>487</sup>

After this event, the apostles return to Jerusalem (cf. Lk 24:53), as reaction to the angels’ commandment, thus completing the chiasmic structure of the whole fragment. The emphasis of the fact that the disciples *saw* him ascending (εἶθεάσασθε αὐτὸν

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<sup>483</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Tractates on John* 21.13.2-4, ACCS – NT 5: 11.

<sup>484</sup> JOHNSON 1992: 31.

<sup>485</sup> ‘So benutzt Lukas zu Beginn seines Zweiten Buches die Perikope, mit der er die Zeit Jesu beendet hatte, um mit ihrer Hilfe nun auch den Abschluß der Zeit der Kirche *vorwegnehmend* zu markieren und auf die Parusie auszublicken: Die Himmelfahrt wird zum Bild für die Parusie.’ LOHFINK 1971: 262.

<sup>486</sup> PELIKAN 2005: 43.

<sup>487</sup> RUZER 2008: 174.

πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν) once again confirms the Lukan composition of the text.<sup>488</sup> Zwiep stresses that the author focuses on the visibility of the Ascension event, and points out that ‘although this is a standard feature of rapture stories, it also reveals Luke’s concern to authenticate the apostolic witnesses.’<sup>489</sup>

Verse 12 is a transitional one and can be interpreted both as a conclusion of the preceding pericope and as the beginning of a new section.<sup>490</sup> In this verse we are given the approximate location of the Ascension, the Mount of Olives, with the observation that the distance between Jerusalem and the Mount is ‘a sabbath day’s journey away’. This reference to the Saturday gives an indication of the proximity of this place to Jerusalem<sup>491</sup> and also that they were still under the OT law.<sup>492</sup> The suggestion is inexact and one definitely cannot use it to argue that the Ascension could have taken place on a Saturday. The Parousia which is referred to in the preceding verse is connected to the location of the Ascension, because both Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives are mentioned as location of the Saviour’s second coming (Zech 14:4 LXX; cf. 4Bar 9:20).<sup>493</sup>

According to Sleeman, the beginning verses not only work as introduction to the themes subsequently developed in the Book of Acts, they also fix its spatial structure. ‘The ascension is *the* moment of spatial realignment in Acts (cf. 1:1-2a), and Acts as a narrative whole cannot be understood without ongoing reference to the heavenly Christ... Functioning as far more than the simple setting, the geography of these verses structures the shape of the narrative and communicates the Christocentric theology of Acts 1, which in turn shapes expectation concerning the unfolding narrative.’<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Cf. SABBE 1991: 160.

<sup>489</sup> ZWIEP 2004: 158.

<sup>490</sup> However, PERVO (2009: 46) remarks that ‘Lucan style is often fluid and is thus resistant to rigid divisions.’

<sup>491</sup> ‘The Mount of Olives (Matt 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 22:39) is situated less than 1 km from Jerusalem’s walls to east. It offered a splendid view over the city and over the Temple’s esplanade. The roman road from Jericho to Jerusalem passes through the Mount of Olives. In the times of Jesus the hill bearing that name was covered with a dense forest of olive trees propitious for solitary retreats.’ VERZAN 1994: 32; cf. SLEEMAN 2009: 80.

<sup>492</sup> ‘Thus, the apostles are to remember that, between the earthly Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives as the locale of the resurrected Jesus’ epiphany lays the hurdle of “the Law”...’ TARAZI 2001: 189.

<sup>493</sup> HENGEL 1995.2: 46-47.

<sup>494</sup> SLEEMAN 2009: 80-81.

Many authors put emphasis on the centrality of the Ascension scene in Luke's writings. On the one hand, his Gospel ends with a short account of the episode, as the pinnacle of the Lord's physical presence on earth. On the other hand, the Book of Acts begins with a long depiction of the Ascension, attesting Luke's intention to place the Ascension scene as the key moment of the two writings. Talbers explains saying that 'on the one hand, Mediterranean documents frequently, if not generally, have their key point at the centre. This is true both for Greco-Roman and for Jewish writings. On the other hand, Luke-Acts seems to fit into this general tendency. At least from Luke 9:51 everything in the third gospel moves toward the ascension. Luke 24:50-53 closes the Gospel. Acts 1:9-11 opens the Acts. From Acts 1 everything moves out from the ascension.'<sup>495</sup> Further on, several other similitudes between the themes in Lk 24 and Acts 1 can be traced: Lk 24:33-34, 36 – Acts 1:3; Lk 24:36-43 – Acts 1:3; Lk 24:49 – Acts 1:4; Lk 24:47-48 – Acts 1:8b; Lk 24:51-52 – Acts 1:9, 12.<sup>496</sup> 'Luke differentiates between the resurrection and the Ascension. The resurrection conveys the fact that God revealed himself bodily, that he revealed his Divinity in Jesus' body. Jesus Christ ended his earthly life ascending into heavens with his body (cf. Lk 24:50-52), "at the right hand of the Father", where he sits in communion with the Father (cf. Acts 2:33-34; Ps 109:1-2), that is in a state of glory.'<sup>497</sup>

Strong influences on the narrative construction of the Ascension were the traditions referring to the Prophet Elijah's rapture. After analysing the sources of the Ascension story, Zwiep concludes stating that 'if we trace the comparison with Elijah a little further, it appears that in both cases their heavenly assumption is not the end, but inaugurates a period of temporal preservation in heaven with a view to a future eschatological return.'<sup>498</sup> Nevertheless, traditions concerning Elijah's rapture are not the only sources to be used by Luke (see, for instance, the comparison to Moses). In the Graeco-Roman world of those times, speculations about raptures evolved into a complex set of ideas.

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<sup>495</sup> TALBERT 1974: 112.

<sup>496</sup> TALBERT 1974: 58-59.

<sup>497</sup> PREDA 2005: 64.

<sup>498</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 116.



### 3.3 Comparison between the Ascension accounts in Luke and Acts

Luke narrates the same ascension story twice, at the end of his gospel and in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. And, as Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger rightly observe, ‘in Luke’s dense and concise style, nothing is superfluous.’<sup>499</sup> Therefore, a comparison between the two descriptions of the Ascension is relevant and necessary in order to fully understand the purpose and meaning of the event, as presented by the author of Luke-Acts. Comparing the two accounts of the Ascension (Lk 24 and Acts 1) Bock considers that ‘these texts deal with a single event, but it is possible that Luke pictures the two departures as an *inclusion* bracketing Jesus’ beginning appearance and his final appearance.’<sup>500</sup> Kurz draws attention on the fact that ‘two types of openness that remain at the end of Luke, linkage and incompleteness, prevent complete closure of the plot. Linkage ties the narrative to the next volume.’<sup>501</sup>

Comparing the two accounts of the Ascension of the Christ (Lk 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11) we see two different records of the same event. In the first he is only preoccupied in briefly narrating the end of the Christ’s earthly ministry and finishing the gospel. Through the second one, we understand the significance of Jesus’ departure as the beginning of the Church, and that is why Luke now gives more details to the Ascension story. The most obvious differences between Luke and Acts are the omissions (in Luke) and the additions (in Acts), the key difference being the time of the Ascension (the chronology). Many important new details are offered in Acts (the ascension *on a cloud*, the *apparition of the two angels*, the account about *the apostles’ mission*, and the *promise* of the two men that *Jesus will come back in the same way he departed*). Luke omits in Acts to report the place of the ascension and also the composition of the eyewitnesses group (the audience). We assume that more than the eleven disciples were present and witnesses of the departure of Jesus.<sup>502</sup>

Although the two accounts describing the Ascension of Jesus were treated separately I consider it relevant to include a comparison between them. The comparison is made in order to understand both the differences and similarities between the two accounts and

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<sup>499</sup> RIUS-CAMPS; READ-HEIMERDINGER 2004: 62.

<sup>500</sup> BOCK 1996: 1944.

<sup>501</sup> KURZ 2005: 29.

<sup>502</sup> ‘Les autres personnages mentionnés au verset 14 viennent équilibrer ce que la concentration théologique sur les Apôtres aurait d’incomplet lorsqu’il s’agit de la prière de l’Église: il y a là Marie, mère de Jésus, d’autres femmes, et les frères de Jésus.’ CHAIGNON 2008: 92.

their specific role within Luke's theology. I already discussed the unity between the two Lukan books, emphasising that the strongest argument for this view is found in the Ascension narratives.<sup>503</sup> Luke refers to his first book in the beginning of the second stating that the story of Jesus was presented 'until the day when he was ascended...' (Acts 1:2). Talbert observes that 'from what the author himself says, therefore, the events of Luke 24 and those mentioned in parts of Acts 1 are the same.'<sup>504</sup>

Between the two narratives some clear repetitions or similarities can be traced: the apostles are direct witnesses ('eye-witnesses') of Christ (Lk 24:48 – Acts 1:8); they are to begin their mission from Jerusalem (Lk 24:47 – Acts 1:8); and from Jerusalem to the end of the earth (Lk 24:47 – Acts 1:8); they are commanded to stay in Jerusalem (Lk 24:49 – Acts 1:4); until the coming of the promised Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49 – Acts 1:4); when they will receive 'power' (Lk 24:49 – Acts 1:8); and after these last instructions Jesus ascended into heaven (Lk 24:51 – Acts 1:9). Nelson P. Estrada analysing these similarities sees *an overlap of events*: 'The Ascension story in Acts does not only begin where the Ascension story in Luke ends. Rather, what we find is an overlap of accounts between the two. The overlap is done by the repetition or redundancy of the scenes and phrases.'<sup>505</sup>

Talbert presents the five most discussed views which may explain the similarities and differences between Ascension descriptions in Luke-Acts: the author gained more information during the time interval between the composition of the gospel and that of the Acts;<sup>506</sup> the 'two-traditions' hypothesis;<sup>507</sup> the interpolation hypothesis;<sup>508</sup> for theological reasons the author presents the same event twice making use of typological motifs;<sup>509</sup> the Lukan architecture of Luke-Acts.<sup>510</sup> He concludes by stressing that 'any

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<sup>503</sup> ESTRADA stresses this by saying that 'one of its strongest evidence that shows Acts to be a continuation of the gospel is found in the ascension stories of Lk 24 and Acts 1 (Lk 24:1-43 // Acts 1:1-3; Lk 24:44-49 // Acts 1:11).' ESTRADA 2004: 83.

<sup>504</sup> TALBERT 1974: 59.

<sup>505</sup> ESTRADA 2004: 83.

<sup>506</sup> PLUMMER 1901: 564; cf. HARNACK 1909: 157; HENGEL 1995.2: 46.

<sup>507</sup> DAVIES 1958: 49. Cf. MOULE 1956-1957: 207; LOHFINK 1971: 161-162.

<sup>508</sup> 'The two different accounts of the same series of events may be due to an editorial interpolation into the original text of Luke and/or Acts made in the second century after the Gospel had been separated from its companion volume.' TALBERT 1974: 59.

<sup>509</sup> PARSONS 1987: 189. Cf. DAVIES 1958: 52; STEMPVOORT 1959: 30-42; ZWIEP 1997: 115-117.

<sup>510</sup> TALBERT 1974: 61: '...the correspondences between the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts are stylistic tendency of the author and a part of the Lukan architecture. While they may also have theological significance, the parallels most certainly reflect Lukan style.' Cf. GOULDER 1964: 16-17.

explanation which thinks of Luke as a historian in the modern sense whose concern for factual accuracy is uppermost also must be discarded. Nor is it likely that the author of Luke-Acts can be thought of as a type of historian who would include all traditions known to him in order to be fair. This was certainly not the way he treated Mark, for example. In the light of modern study of the Lucan writings, that explanation is most probable which posits the creative hand of the author. Hence, it seems likely that either a theological or a stylistic tendency or both played a role in the inclusion of the two very similar accounts in Luke 24 and Acts 1.<sup>511</sup> On the other hand, analysing the form, Lohfink attempts to establish whether one or several traditions were used by the Luke-Acts author in composing the Ascension narratives. He discusses three possibilities: Luke used two different traditions (one with the 'priestly blessing' and '*proskynesis*' motifs, and another one containing the motif of the cloud and the 'angels' scene); Luke knew only one Ascension tradition (containing all the elements inserted in two separate narratives); and the different motifs belong to a pre-Lukan tradition passed through an editing process.<sup>512</sup>

The most probable explanation for the different descriptions in Luke-Acts would be the view which emphasises the theological tendencies of Luke in describing the Ascension and the literary purpose of each of the narratives.<sup>513</sup> Overall 'it is clear that Luke had different purposes in these overlapping accounts.'<sup>514</sup> Parsons analysed the *narrative strategies* and the function of the pericopae within their narrative contexts by examining the *redundancy* in Luke-Acts.<sup>515</sup> Rejecting the 'two traditions' hypothesis, I. Howard Marshall considered the account in the gospel to be simply a summary of the Ascension event presented in Acts 1. 'Although it has been argued that Luke later received fuller information, which he incorporated in Acts, it is more probable that he reserved the fuller account for Acts, and was content to give a summary of it, with a particular slant,

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<sup>511</sup> TALBERT 1974: 60.

<sup>512</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 162.

<sup>513</sup> FRANKLIN 1975: 35: 'Theological differences, or rather the different theological points he [*i.e.* Luke] was trying to make, explain the differences between his two accounts of the ascension, for it is viewed against either what has gone before or against what is to follow. Luke 24 sets the event in the context of the life of Jesus, Acts 1 in that of the life of the early Church.' Cf. DONNE 1983: 10.

<sup>514</sup> KURZ 1993: 21.

<sup>515</sup> PARSONS 1987: 191.

in the Gospel. If so, answers to the question of the sources and historicity of the present scene are dependent upon the investigation of Acts 1:1-11.’<sup>516</sup>

According to Tannenhill, the redundancy (or repetitive patterns) in Luke-Acts has eight functions,<sup>517</sup> as presented by Parsons: ‘(1) it combats the tendency to forget information over a long narrative; (2) it is a means of emphasis; (3) it has a persuasive effect; (4) it allows for character development; (5) it confirms expectations reached through the reading process; (6) it allows changes in the pattern to be noted; (7) it provides a sense of unity in the narrative; and (8) it encourages interaction among the characters and events in the reading process.’<sup>518</sup> In fact, when speaking of redundancy both repetition and variation are implied. In comparing the two Ascension narratives in Luke-Acts I must now turn to analyse these two aspects.

First, at least three repetitive elements can be observed: the characters of the story are the same, Christ and his apostles;<sup>519</sup> the Ascension is seen as the last appearance of the resurrected one to the disciples; and in both pericopae Jesus instructs his apostles in order to become his witnesses, preaching his Gospel. Furthermore, Luke emphasises the strong link between the Ascension and the coming of the Spirit; Jesus promised to the apostles to send them the Holy Spirit in Lk 24:49 and Acts 1:4-5, 8. Parsons suggests that ‘by repeating the ascension in Acts, the narrator has identified the story of Jesus with the story of the Church.’<sup>520</sup> Therefore, the repetition of the Ascension description in Acts is supposed to transmit to the reader that the two stages in the Salvation history, the life of the Saviour on earth and the history of the Church, cannot be separated, one being the natural continuation of the other.<sup>521</sup>

Secondly, the striking variations in the Ascension story in Acts raised a series of questions regarding the purpose and function of the narrative in Luke’s thought. As Parsons observes, ‘what is troublesome for the reader is not the similarities, but the

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<sup>516</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 908.

<sup>517</sup> TANNENHILL 1984: 238-240.

<sup>518</sup> PARSONS 1987: 192.

<sup>519</sup> From tradition, at the site of the Ascension, apart from the disciples at least the mother of Christ, Mary, was present. However, Luke does not include any information regarding this and he even wants to transmit that only the eleven were present. PARSONS (1987: 270 n.25) argues that ‘the disciples seem to include a larger group than just the apostles’.

<sup>520</sup> PARSONS 1987: 192.

<sup>521</sup> SLEEMAN 2009:74-75.

dissimilarities between the two accounts'.<sup>522</sup> More elements of variation than repetition can be found between the two narratives. In Estrada's view, 'the variation, more than the repetition and redundancy of the ascension story in Acts 1 helps to show the motif of separation by the apostles from Jesus.'<sup>523</sup>

One of the most discussed contradictions in Luke-Acts is the chronological status of the Ascension. Although no timeframe is given, the Ascension in Lk 24 seems to be on the same day with the Resurrection (on the evening of Easter Sunday; vv. 13, 36, 50), whereas in Acts 1:2 the author mentions forty days after the resurrection as the exact time of Christ's departure. During those forty days Jesus appeared to his apostles and instructed them; all these elements are also recorded in the gospel's ending but, apparently, in a much contracted time span. 'Although the time factor in Lk 24 constitutes a problem, since it appears that all events described there take place on the same day, the schematization concluding with the Ascension remains the same. Thus in the contexts of Acts 1:9-11 and Lk 24:50-53 ("Mk" 16:19-20 is not a separate witness here) the Ascension comes as the final appearance story, as it were.'<sup>524</sup> As I noted before, the most probable explanation for this conflict is the chronological break hypothesis. If this is so, than between vv. 44-53 or 50-53 the recorded events take place after the Resurrection Sunday, over an indefinite period of time. Supporting this hypothesis and deciding for the break after v. 49, Marshall noted that 'the teaching given by Jesus follows on directly from the recognition scene and also leads on directly to the departure scene. The whole series is thus placed on Easter Sunday evening, although in Acts 1 Luke puts the departure forty days after the resurrection. Unless Luke altered his chronology between the composition of the Gospel and the Acts (which is improbable in view of the unified character of Lk-Acts), he has consciously telescoped his story at some point.'<sup>525</sup> In my opinion, a break in the chronological framework after the scene of the appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem (Lk 24:36-43) is most probable.<sup>526</sup> Parsons explains the historical inconsistency by means of literary functions: 'Momentarily suspending those historical concerns, the temporal discrepancy

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<sup>522</sup> PARSONS 1987: 193.

<sup>523</sup> ESTRADA 2004: 92.

<sup>524</sup> ALSUP 1975: 145.

<sup>525</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 904; cf. MARSH; MOYISE 2006: 39-40.

<sup>526</sup> PLUMMER (1901: 564) suggested the possibility of several breaks in the chronology, probably after v. 43 and also after v. 49.

is readily explained on literary grounds.’<sup>527</sup> Therefore, he writes, ‘if the narrator is attempting in the closing scene to educate his readers concerning the relationship between the crucifixion and exaltation, then a close-up scenic ending is the most appropriate to use... Forty days of appearances in Acts, on the other hand, is entirely appropriate in its narrative context. Establishing the disciples as reliable and legitimate successors of Jesus is a major task of the opening narrative in Acts.’<sup>528</sup>

Another apparent incongruity between the two accounts is the locale of the Ascension. The location mentioned in the gospel, Bethany, seems to be in disagreement with the one presented in Acts (Mount of Olives). In fact, both the vicinity of Bethany (Lk 24:50) and the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12) describe the same place.<sup>529</sup> Marshall notes that ‘there is no obvious reason for the alteration. The two places [Bethany and the Mount of Olives] were regarded as close together (Lk 19:29 par. Mk 11:1), Bethany lying on the E slope of the mountain.’<sup>530</sup> Therefore, as I argued before the apparent contradiction serves the purposes of Luke’s theology.<sup>531</sup>

Five other less important differences between the Luke-Acts Ascension narratives can be identified: the disciples return to Jerusalem but with different purposes and different specific destinations;<sup>532</sup> the account in Lk is recorded in structure of narration without dialogue, whereas in Acts in conversational form - questions and answers (Acts 1:6-8, 11);<sup>533</sup> no reference to blessings (of any kind) is made in Acts, whereas in Luke the

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<sup>527</sup> PARSONS 1987: 193. Cf. ESTRADA 2004: 93.

<sup>528</sup> PARSONS 1987: 194.

<sup>529</sup> DILLON (1978: 224) notes that ‘the locale of this ascension-scene is reconciled without difficulty with that of Acts 1:12, once it is recalled that Bethany and the Mount of Olives were associated by the evangelist in his tracing of the Master’s *itinerary to Jerusalem* (Lk 19:29),’ and that Luke, ‘in typical fashion, uses complementary rather than repetitive data from a source to locate two versions of the same event.’

<sup>530</sup> MARSHALL 1978: 908. In the same way BOCK (1996: 1944) demonstrates that the two locales overlap, Bethany being on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives.

<sup>531</sup> Cf. PARSONS 1987: 193-194. Also, CHAIGNON sees in the mention of Mount of Olives a link to the prophetic resonance. ‘Ce lieu a, sous la plume de Luc, une résonance prophétique: c’est sur le mont des Oliviers qu’Ézéchiél voit se reposer la gloire de Dieu quittant le Temple (Ez 11 :23); il joue un rôle important dans le combat eschatologique annoncé par Zacharie (Za 14 :4).’ CHAIGNON 2008: 88.

<sup>532</sup> ‘In Luke, of course, the disciples return with joy to the temple and are incessantly blessing God. In Acts, on the other hand, the disciples return to the upper room where they “with one accord devoted themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14).’ PARSONS 1987: 194.

<sup>533</sup> ‘The scene at the end of Luke is a silent one... The Acts account, on the other hand, is more than half dialogue – and the dialogue is important.’ PARSONS 1987: 197.

author records Christ's final blessing and the apostles blessing God in the Temple;<sup>534</sup> Luke seems to refer to Jesus' Ascension as a 'departure' in the Gospel and in Acts as a 'glorification';<sup>535</sup> and, finally, the 'cloud' motif and the appearance of the 'two men in white garments' scene are missing in Lk 24. Concluding his comparison of the Ascension in Luke-Acts, Parsons affirms that 'variation produces movement... The movement produced in these variations is striking. Repetition reaffirms the link between the Gospel and Acts; variation impels the reader to leave the Gospel story and move on to the story of the church.'<sup>536</sup>

Consequently, five elements of concern and divergence in Luke's Ascension accounts will be analysed: in Lk 24, the *blessing* of Jesus, the disciples' state of *joy* and the *blessing* in the Temple; in Acts 1, the *forty-days* period, the *cloud* motif and the *angels* scene.

As I discussed before, Luke mentions Jesus raising his hands and *blessing* the apostles only in the Ascension pericope at the end of his gospel.<sup>537</sup> The majority of scholars see in the benediction gesture of Christ a priestly blessing, linking it to the OT blessings accounts of Aaron (Lev 9:22) or Simeon, the High Priest (Sir 50:19-23).<sup>538</sup> Zwiep draws attention to the fact that 'especially the elsewhere unattested triad εὐλογία (= blessing)-προσκύνησις - εὐλογία (= thanksgiving) should remove all doubt that the finale of Ben Sira sets its imprint upon Luke's Gospel finale.'<sup>539</sup> Unlike these authors who compare Jesus' blessing with the action of Simon II, the high priest in Sir 50:20-21, Bock (following Fitzmyer 1985: 1590 and Nolland 1993b: 1227) argues that 'Luke lacks emphasis on Jesus as priest.'<sup>540</sup> However, C. Westermann stresses that, contrasting with

<sup>534</sup> 'Kennzeichnet für Lk 24 und nur dort vorhanden sind die Motive des Segens und der Proskynese, nur in Apg 1 anzutreffen ist das Motiv der Wolke und die Engelszene. Durch diese je besonderen Motive erhält jede der beiden Szenen einen ganz eigenen Charakter.' LOHFINK 1971: 160.

<sup>535</sup> The emphasis in Lk 24 is on the disciples and their final encounter with Jesus but, on the other hand in Acts the Ascension is meant to assure them of Christ's heavenly status. Again, the theological concerns of the author prevail in describing the same event in different ways.

<sup>536</sup> PARSONS 1987: 194.

<sup>537</sup> 'Wird der Segen einer größeren Anzahl von Menschen erteilt, so bleibt es beim Erheben der Hände, das als Segensgeste im Neuen Testament nur beim Abschied Jesu in Lk 24:50 erwähnt wird und der priesterlichen Segenspraxis entspricht... Durch die körperliche Zuwendung entspricht die Segengeste der direkten Adressantenanrede, und wir als Wesensmerkmal von Segenswünschen und -zusagen festgestellt haben.' HECKEL 2002: 346.

<sup>538</sup> Among others, see: KOSANKE 1993: 67; LOHFINK 1971: 167-169; DILLON 1978: 220-224; JOHNSON 1991: 403-404; STEMPVOORT 1959: 34-35; HECKEL 2002: 77-93.

<sup>539</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 88.

<sup>540</sup> BOCK 1996: 1945; SCHWEMER 2003:228.

Jesus' blessing which is a farewell benediction, the blessing gestures recorded in Sir 50 and Lev 9 have a cultic function. Significant differences between the priestly blessing tradition and the one recorded by Luke can be observed.<sup>541</sup> Still, this does not purport that Luke did not rely on the Jewish biblical accounts of the priestly blessings, such as Sir 50.<sup>542</sup> Ulrich Heckel shows that only in Lev 9:22 and Sir 50:20 (LXX) the rising of the hands is connected to the act of blessing, as in Lk 24.<sup>543</sup> Also, it seems clear that Luke had a specific reason to place the blessing act at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry.<sup>544</sup> 'The blessing marks the close of the earthly life; it witnesses to the ending of a chapter, but it nevertheless means that the life still has significance for them [*i.e.* the apostles]. It signals the drawing to a close of the period of the Jesus of history, but it does so in such a way that that life, that episode in time, is taken up into the period that is now to begin. It is an end which is at the same time not an end. It marks a beginning of something which comes out of what is ending.'<sup>545</sup> Parsons sees in this farewell blessing an appropriate finale of the Gospel.<sup>546</sup> This act of priestly blessing upon the disciples is directly linked to the apostles' joyous state and their *proskynesis*.<sup>547</sup>

The apostles' response to Jesus' blessing and departure is recorded in the last two verses of the Third Gospel in terms of *joy* and obedience. While *blessing* God the eleven return to Jerusalem in a state of joyfulness.<sup>548</sup> As I noted above, the apparent paradox of the disciples' reaction to their master's departure, is easily explained by the promise made

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<sup>541</sup> The place of blessing is Bethany (on the Mount of Olives) and not the Temple; Christ blesses the apostles with his power as God and not as a ritual gesture (this divine blessing is received with *proskynesis*); the act of blessing is connected to the *sending of God's Spirit*. Cf. HECKEL 2002: 89-93.

<sup>542</sup> HECKEL 2002: 93.

<sup>543</sup> HECKEL 2002: 77: 'Da die erhobenen Hände in der Septuaginta nur in Lev 9:22; Sir 50:20 mit dem Segnen verbunden sind, kann die lukanische Wortwahl kein Zufall sein.'

<sup>544</sup> In BOCK's opinion, the act of blessing the apostles in v. 51 'adds a note of solemnity and closure to the proceeding', but he also considers that 'there is no need to read into this act a "final" departure'. BOCK 1996: 1944.

<sup>545</sup> FRANKLIN 1975: 36. PARSONS 1987: 197.

<sup>546</sup> PARSONS 1987: 197.

<sup>547</sup> 'À l'acte de bénédiction de Jésus répondent un prosternement des disciples, leur joie tandis qu'ils retournent à Jérusalem et leur propre bénédiction à Dieu dans le Temple. Ils adorent le mystère du Dieu Sauveur manifesté dans l'Ascension du Seigneur Jésus en se prosternant devant lui ; ils retournent dans la ville messianique en laissant éclater la joie messianique qui s'exprime dans le Temple en une prière de bénédiction perpétuelle (διὰ παντός). Les temps messianiques sont inaugurés. À la bénédiction de Jésus (εὐλογεῖν vv. 49-50) fait écho leur bénédiction dans le lieu de la présence de Dieu, tandis qu'ils demeurent placés sous le geste de celui qui a été emporté au ciel.' CHAIGNON 2008: 80.

<sup>548</sup> MORRICE 1984: 96: 'This was the joy of men who were convinced of the exaltation of their risen Lord and who looked forward to the fulfilment of Christ's promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:4f.).'



by Jesus before his Ascension: the disciples are to receive God's spirit (24:49). The term χαρά used by Luke to describe joy appears 'especially where there is mention of eschatological fulfilment of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ.'<sup>549</sup> It can be observed that in Luke's gospel only after the Ascension the disciples experience joy; although joy is recorded for the first time after the resurrection in Lk 24:41 (associated with disbelief), it is not until Christ's departure scene that the author describes their return *with great joy*.<sup>550</sup> As in Sir 50:21, the *proskynesis* in v. 52 represents a consequence of Jesus' blessing, the only difference being addressed to the ascended Christ and not to the High Priest.<sup>551</sup> Therefore, it is most likely that the element of *proskynesis* is also inspired by Sir 50:21.<sup>552</sup> Dillon observes that 'this is the first time the verb προσκυνέω is appearing in this gospel... Proper adoration was saved, so to speak, to be tendered here at the ascension, with the proper term in use, depicting what could only be the relation of the believing disciple to the Christ of Easter.'<sup>553</sup>

If in the gospel Luke does not explicitly indicate any timeframe between the resurrection and the Ascension, in Acts 1:3 a period of *forty days* is mentioned. During these forty days the apostles receive instruction regarding their mission to spread the good news of Christ's resurrection.<sup>554</sup> Parsons notes that 'the period of forty days is needed in Acts not to allow Jesus enough time to make appearances, but to assure the reader that the disciples are "fully instructed" (see Acts 20:20, 27, 31). During this period of time, then, Jesus spoke to them about 'the things concerning the kingdom of God' (1:3).'<sup>555</sup> This symbolically charged, round number was used by the author in order to transmit a certain message, that the apostles' instruction was complete. 'Furthermore, the typological force of the number forty prevents taking it as an exact date. The forty days rather delimit the *period* of appearances and final instructions

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<sup>549</sup> MORRICE 1984: 75.

<sup>550</sup> 'When he [*i.e.* Jesus] appears to the Eleven, they are "startled and frightened" supposing that they beheld a spirit (24:37). It is not until the ascension that joy and understanding come to them (24:52-53).'

FRANKLIN, *Christ the Lord*, p. 31.

<sup>551</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 172.

<sup>552</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 93-94; cf. HECKEL 2002: 87.

<sup>553</sup> DILLON 1978: 223. Cf. ZWIEP 1997: 93: 'For the first time in Luke's Gospel προσκύνησις is offered to Jesus (notably in his absence!).'

<sup>554</sup> 'Die Zeit zwischen Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt war "secundum ordinem redemptionis" nötig, damit Christus durch verschiedene Erscheinungen die Wahrheit seiner Auferstehung beweisen und die nun im Glauben gefestigten Jünger eingehender belehren konnte.'

MARSCHLER 2003: 624.

<sup>555</sup> PARSONS 1987: 194; cf. ZWIEP 1997: 97.

before the ascension.’<sup>556</sup> All the evidence suggests that Luke may have drawn his mention of forty days of instruction from the Jewish-biblical tradition.<sup>557</sup> The number forty is used metaphorically both in the OT and the NT, expressing a period of preparation.<sup>558</sup> However, James D.G. Dunn offers another explanation for Luke’s use of the forty days. He prefers ‘the explanation that the tradition of the first Pentecost was already sufficiently established – that is, of the first great experience of the Spirit in collective Christian memory, as having happened on the next pilgrim feast (Pentecost). Forty days would be the next round number before fifty.’<sup>559</sup> Anyway, it is clear that the element of forty days cannot be taken literally and must be interpreted theologically.<sup>560</sup> Zwiep concludes that ‘the number forty should rather be seen in the light of Luke’s tendency to introduce theologically significant, round numbers into his narratives.’<sup>561</sup>

In Acts 1:9, Luke introduces the *cloud* motif to describe the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. The occurrence of the cloud in this passage seems to have a twofold meaning: it is the vehicle of ascension and, also, it covers the eyes of the apostles.<sup>562</sup> As J. Luzarraga observes, the cloud motif is found in the earliest kerygma in connection with the Son of Man.<sup>563</sup> Many authors compare this cloud with the cloud of Transfiguration (Lk 9:34) or with the cloud of divine presence from the OT (Exod 24:16-18; 33:9-11; 34:5; 2Macc 2:8; Ps 96:2).<sup>564</sup> Also, as I stated above, the pericope of the Ascension in

<sup>556</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 98. Cf. LOHFINK 1971: 176; DONNE 1983: 71 n. 19; STEMPVOORT 1959: 39.

<sup>557</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 180-181. ZWIEP stresses that the forty-day period reminds the reader ‘of the rabbinic emphasis on reliable instruction, and in particular the forty-day scheme of the Jewish rapture traditions of Ezra and Baruch, who instructed their disciples before they were taken up, to ensure that their teaching would survive after their departure.’ ZWIEP 1997: 172.

<sup>558</sup> The rain fell for forty days and flooded the earth (Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6), Israel sojourns for forty years in the desert (Exod 16:35; Deut 8:2, 4; 9:9, 25; Ps 95:10; Neh 9:21; Amos 5:25); Moses receives the law after forty days on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:18; 34:28); King David reigns for forty years (1Kgs 2:11); Elijah goes on Mount Horeb forty days and nights (1Kgs 19:8) King Solomon reigns for forty years over Israel (2Ch 9:30); Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness, tempted by Satan (Mk 1:13; Lk 4:2). Cf. KOSANKE 1993: 75; JERVELL 1998: 111; ZWIEP 2001: 344-345.

<sup>559</sup> DUNN 2001: 306.

<sup>560</sup> Cf. DUNN 2001: 307; FRANKLIN 1975: 33; CHAIGNON 2008: 86-87; RIUS-CAMPS; READ-HEIMERDINGER 2004: 64-66.

<sup>561</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 187;

<sup>562</sup> Cf. FRANKLIN 1975: 32. ‘Just as the cloud at the transfiguration prevented the by-standers from seeing what happened and at the same time provided Moses and Elijah with access to the heavenly realm, so the ascension cloud has a double function.’ ZWIEP 1997: 105.

<sup>563</sup> ‘Para valorar el pensamiento evangélico sobre la nube en la Ascensión de Jesús, hay que tener en cuenta también los otros momentos en que Jesús viene conectado con la nube en la predicación primitiva, sobre todo en su identificación con el Hijo del Hombre, a la que nos referiremos más adelante.’ LUZARRAGA 1973: 221.

<sup>564</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 189; cf. ZWIEP 1997: 105; CHAIGNON 2008: 95-96; LUZARRAGA 1973: 223-224.

Acts is linked with the prophecies regarding the Son of Man who will come on the clouds of heaven (Dan 7:13, cf. Mk 23:26; Matt 24:30).<sup>565</sup> Lohfink argues that Luke probably used and edited the markan tradition of the coming of the Son of Man.<sup>566</sup> Dunn concludes by saying that ‘Luke was probably aware not only of the role of the cloud in rapture/assumption stories, but also of the apocalyptic imagery of Jesus’ parousia on clouds. The point is that such apocalyptic language would be widely recognised even then as having a symbolic rather than literal force.’<sup>567</sup> The function of the cloud in the Ascension narrative is clearly to indicate the separation between the earthly world and heaven and Luke uses this motif as a vehicle which transfers Jesus into the divine realm.<sup>568</sup>

Last, but not least *the appearance of the two angels* scene is introduced in Acts 1:10-11 in order to elucidate fully the significance of the Ascension event and to connect it to the Parousia.<sup>569</sup> As the *angeli interpretes* from the empty tomb narrative (Lk 24:4; cf. Jn 20:12), the *two men in white garments* transmit a very important message: that Jesus will come back at the end of times.<sup>570</sup> Lohfink argues that the number of *two* men (ἄνδρες δύο) represents a topos used by Luke first in his gospel (24:4) and drawn from a pre-Lukan tradition (cf. Gen 19:1; Dan 12:5; 2Macc 3:26, 33; 3Macc 6:18; 2En 1:4; Mk 16:3).<sup>571</sup> Estrada emphasises the ‘vital’ role that this description of the two men has for the Ascension scene’s finale. ‘From the readers’ perspective (even if one argues that the two men in Lk 24 are not the same as the two men in Acts 1), the credibility of the two men in dazzling apparel has already been established and substantiated in Lk 24, that is, their message about Jesus being alive is true.’ Therefore, he says, ‘the validity of what they are promising the Eleven is no longer a question for the readers of Acts.’<sup>572</sup>

<sup>565</sup> WITHERINGTON III 1998: 112; KOSANKE 1993: 76-77; BUTH 1998: 189.

<sup>566</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 187-193.

<sup>567</sup> DUNN 2001: 318; cf. PARSONS 1987: 198.

<sup>568</sup> LUZARRAGA 1973: 225.

<sup>569</sup> Zwiep observes that ‘what is often overlooked is that the words of the angelic interpreters are most appropriate to the occasion seen from the Jewish rapture perspective: they connect Jesus’ rapture/ascension with his eschatological *return* (“this Jesus... will come in the same way as you saw him going”), not with his present position in heaven as the Exalted One (“this Jesus... God has exalted”) as in the kerygmatic sections in the missionary speeches of Acts.’ ZWIEP 2001: 346. Cf. KOSANKE 1993: 73.

<sup>570</sup> ‘The two men vindicate belief in the parousia though they show that the glorification of Jesus does not depend upon it.’ FRANKLIN 1975. Cf. ESTRADA 2004: 51; ZWIEP 1997: 107.

<sup>571</sup> ‘Die Zweizahl der Engel in Apg 1:10 ist lukanisch und geht auf die Zweizahl der Engel in der Grabesgeschichte (Lk 24:4) zurück. Dort dürfte das Motiv bereits vorlukanisch sein.’ LOHFINK 1971: 198.

<sup>572</sup> ESTRADA 2004: 51-52.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that although the two Ascension narratives seem to be in disagreement, those variations in the text may be explained by their functions within Luke-Acts. It is clear that Luke describes the same event of Christ's Ascension in both his books and he intended to do so. The intended purpose of each of them is both to describe a historical event and to reassure the readers of the status of Jesus and his followers.

## CHAPTER 4: THE RECEPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ASCENSION IN PRE-NICENE CHRISTIANITY

### 4.1 Traditions of the ascension(s) in Christian apocryphal literature

Although the Ascension is described in the New Testament only in the Lukan writings (and in the interpolated ‘longer ending’ of Mark), there are a number of extra-canonical sources which offer a narration of Christ’s departure into heaven.<sup>573</sup>

It can be easily observed that, unlike the pre-Nicene patristic writers, the authors of apocryphal literature do not simply record the Ascension tradition as preserved in the NT, but resort to the apocalyptic Jewish traditions and imaginative reconstructions.<sup>574</sup> In the subsequent section I will analyse some of the most important Christian witnesses of the ascension traditions.

#### 4.1.1 Ascensions of Old Testament figures

##### The Life of Adam and Eve

The Latin version of the primary book of Adam is commonly known by the name of *Vitae Adam et Evae*, and it is certain that it represents a translation of a Greek original.<sup>575</sup> Stone presents another hypothesis, adopted by many contemporary scholars, which affirms that the *Apocalypse of Moses* (the Greek book of Adam and Eve) is itself a translation from a Semitic language, and that the other works somehow derive from it.<sup>576</sup> Most probably, the original composition was produced between 100 BC and A.D. 200 in Alexandria.

The eighth pericope (25:1-29:10), found only in the Latin recension, represents a narration in Midrashic form of the ascension into heaven of Adam (a vision).<sup>577</sup> This addition (chs. 25-29) with visions of Adam narrated to Seth, and the other editorial

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<sup>573</sup> PARSONS 1987: 145.

<sup>574</sup> DAVIES 1058: 78.

<sup>575</sup> STONE 1992: 14-15.

<sup>576</sup> STONE 1992: 43; see also: TROMP 2005.

<sup>577</sup> For the present study I used the critical Synopsis edition of ANDERSON; STONE 1994: 23.

activities on the part of the Latin translator or his Greek *Vorlage* gave birth to a completely different document.<sup>578</sup>

In LAE 25:1-3 (*Vitae*) Adam recounts his assumption to the heavenly paradise accompanied by the archangel Michael, and sees the divine throne and even God himself:

<sup>1</sup> Adam said to Seth, 'Listen, Seth, my son, and I will pass on to you what I heard and saw.  
<sup>2</sup> After your mother and I had been driven out of Paradise, while we were praying, Michael the archangel and messenger of God came to me. <sup>3</sup> And I saw a chariot like the wind and its wheels were fiery. I was carried off into the Paradise of righteousness, and I saw the Lord sitting and his appearance was unbearable flaming fire. And many thousands of angels were at the right and the left of the chariot.<sup>579</sup>

The Paradise of righteousness to which Adam is taken in his vision, other than the earthly Garden of Eden (referred to as the Paradise), is clearly the Heaven.<sup>580</sup> The heavenly journey of Adam must not be understood as expressing a rapture topos, because in this case there are no mentions of a physical taking up into Paradise.<sup>581</sup> In LAE (*Apocalypse*) 33, before Adam's death, Eve receives a vision of the heavenly things and the soul of Adam is taken up into heaven.

Meyer argued that the Latin *Vitae* was translated after the third or fourth century AD. Levison (1988) affirmed that the main purpose of the work is to 'exonerate Adam and denigrate Eve.'<sup>582</sup> It is generally assumed that the text represents a Christian addition made by a later editor and based on Merkabah tradition.

### **The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah**

The Ascension of Isaiah is a Jewish-Christian apocalypse written probably in Syria, between A.D. 112 and 138.<sup>583</sup> The document is a composite work, combining the old Jewish legend of the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* (chapters 1-5)<sup>584</sup> and the *Vision of Isaiah*

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<sup>578</sup> DE JONGE 2000: 246-247.

<sup>579</sup> LAE 25:1-3, in JOHNSON, *OTP* 2: 261.

<sup>580</sup> COLLINS 1996: 33.

<sup>581</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 22.

<sup>582</sup> STONE 1992: 23.

<sup>583</sup> KNIGHT 1995: 9.

<sup>584</sup> The Martyrdom of Isaiah, which is a composite itself, recounts and develops the events of 2Kgs 21. An independent section, 3:13-4:22, called the *Testament of Hezekiah* (or *The First Vision*) is identified as a Christian apocalypse, describing a vision of the coming of Jesus. Cf. KNIGHT 1996: 13-14.

(chapters 6-11), which is a Christian interpolation.<sup>585</sup> If in the case of the former we can argue that it was probably composed in Hebrew and translated into Greek, in the case of the *Visions*, it was certainly written in Greek from the beginning. Although the writing is extant in a number of different languages (Greek, Ethiopic, Latin, Slavonic, Coptic), the complete writing survived only in three Ethiopic manuscripts.<sup>586</sup>

In the second part of the book, the *Vision of Isaiah*, a heavenly journey of Isaiah is described, assisted by an angel through the Seven Heavens. Isaiah sees the Lord ascending through the seven heavens, and this ascension is described in detail, combining the physical departure of Christ with the notion of glorification (11:22-33). It is most certainly a Christian composition concentrated on Jesus' death, his resurrection, and especially on the ascension.<sup>587</sup> There is an interesting analogy of Isaiah's mystical journey with the later *Hekhalot Rabbati*.<sup>588</sup>

22 And the angel who led me said to me, 'Understand, Isaiah.' And I saw when he sent out the twelve disciples and ascended. 23 And I saw him, and he was in the firmament, but was not transformed into their form. And all the angels of the firmament, and Satan, saw him and worshipped. 24 And there was much sorrow there as they said, 'How did our Lord descend upon us, and we did not notice the glory which was upon him, which we (now) see was upon him from the sixth heaven? 25 And he ascended into the second heaven, and he was not transformed, but all the angels who (were) on the right and on the left, and the throne in the middle, 26 worshipped him, and praised him, and said, 'How did our Lord remain hidden from us as he descended, and we did not notice?' 27 And in the same way he ascended into the third (heaven), and in the same way they praised him and spoke. 28 And in the fourth heaven and also the fifth they spoke exactly the same way. 29 But there was one glory, and from it he was not transformed. 30 And I saw when he ascended into the sixth heaven, that they worshipped him and praised him; 31 but in all the heavens the praise grew louder. 32 And I saw how he ascended into the seventh heaven, and all the righteous and all the angels praised him. And then I saw that he sat down at the right hand of that Great Glory, whose glory I told you I could not behold. 33 And also I saw that the angel of the Holy Spirit sat on the left.<sup>589</sup>

<sup>585</sup> The second part (also called *The Second Vision*), which is also a Christian composition, is related thematically to the first five chapters and was added much later to the corpus. KNIGHT 1996: 15.

<sup>586</sup> The Ethiopic translation was probably made in the fifth century after a Greek version. For an introduction to the different MSS preserved, see: KNIBB, *OTP* 2: 144-146; and the current critical edition: BETTIOLO; KOSSOVA; LEONARDI *et al* 1995: 3-39.

<sup>587</sup> 'Une deuxième partie décrit comment le prophète, par un voyage dans les sept cieux, est témoin de la venue du Christ au monde (6-11). La provenance chrétienne de 3,13-4,22 et de 6-11 est généralement reconnue.' VERHEYDEN 1989: 247.

<sup>588</sup> 'The text describes how a mystic told his disciples what was happening to him as he made a heavenly ascension.' KNIGHT 1995: 67.

<sup>589</sup> VisIs 11:22-33, in KNIBB, *OTP* 2: 175-176.

The Beloved One ascends to heaven and receives angelic worship and praise in all the heavens, and then, in the seventh, he takes his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Knight suggests that the idea of enthronement seems to be derived from 1Pet 3:22, and therefore from Ps 110:1.<sup>590</sup> The final verse (11:33) completes the Trinitarian image of God's throne. Enrico Norelli interprets this episode as a divine (heavenly) liturgy.<sup>591</sup> Isaiah is presented here in relation to the Beloved and his martyrdom results from his vision of Christ's heavenly journey, including his crucifixion. Furthermore, in the Ethiopic version of *AscenIs* 9:16 Jesus' Ascension occurs 545 days after the resurrection, a tradition probably taken from Gnostic sources.<sup>592</sup>

As John Alsup concludes 'the literary genre of the text is a prophetic vision with apocalyptic features and is distinct from the gospel appearance story *Gattung*.'<sup>593</sup> Although its form is that of an apocalypse, the focus of the book is on the history of Jesus (the past) and not on eschatology.<sup>594</sup> The typological unity resides in many aspects of the life and death of the prophet, as depicted in this Christian writing. Although some parallels between the *Ascension of Isaiah* and Luke-Acts can be identified,<sup>595</sup> a literary dependence on Lukan writings cannot be sustained with certainty, but it might reflect a common tradition.<sup>596</sup>

A number of other pseudepigraphal writings that contain Christian additions describe ascents to heaven of OT figures. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15<sup>597</sup> a temporary ascent to heaven may be found. In this vision, Abraham is carried by 'many winds', sees a

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<sup>590</sup> KNIGHT, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, p. 77.

<sup>591</sup> 'Ora, il contest è quello della liturgia celeste. Della vergine dello spirito si dice che, pur sedendo sul trono, loda incessantemente Sabaoth, e quindi si può dedurre che Christo ed essa siano al culmine della lode celeste.' NORELLI 1995: 588.

<sup>592</sup> KNIBB, *OTP* 2: 170; ZWIEP 1997: 99. Compare also the *Letter of James* 2:19-24 (ELLIOTT 1993: 675) which mentions 550 days and *Pistis Sophia* 1 (HENNECKE 1963: 252-253) where Christ ascended in the twelfth year after the resurrection.

<sup>593</sup> ALSUP 1975: 138.

<sup>594</sup> NORRIS 2004: 34.

<sup>595</sup> Cf. the use of 'Elect One' (*AscenIs* 8:7 – Lk 9:35; 23:35), Isaiah's praise of God for his promise (*AscenIs* 8:22 – Lk 24:49; Acts 2:33), and of the ascension (*AscenIs* 11:22-33 – Lk 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-11).

<sup>596</sup> 'Yet these are hardly evidence of literary dependence, for they may easily be explained as arising from shared beliefs and/or a similar theological milieu... Therefore there is insufficient evidence from which to conclude that the *Ascension of Isaiah* is a witness to the knowledge and use of *Luke*.' GREGORY 2003: 77. On the other hand, François BOVON (2005: 385) thinks that the author of the *Ascension of Isaiah* may have used Luke as his source.

<sup>597</sup> Composed between the first and second century A.D. in Hebrew and latter interpolated by a Christian author, this apocryphon is extant only in an Old Slavonic translation.



‘strong light which cannot be described’ and then returns to earth (ApAb 30).<sup>598</sup> In this description many elements of ascent traditions can be identified (angel guide, fire, water, winds) and resembles the esoteric texts of the Hekhalot literature.<sup>599</sup> In the *Testament of Isaac* 6<sup>600</sup> a vision is recorded in which Isaac is assumed into heaven before his death and sees Abraham. The same pattern is also found in the *Testament of Jacob* 5, where the OT patriarch is taken by the archangel Michael into the heavenly realm for a preliminary tour of the next world, an account known to us only in the Bohairic recension.<sup>601</sup> All of the above discussed accounts of OT figures’ raptures follow or lead to the Ascension of the Messiah.

#### 4.1.2 Texts which describe the Ascension of Christ

In the *Sibylline Oracles* 1:379-382, a Christian interpolation,<sup>602</sup> the resurrection and Ascension of Jesus is recorded briefly in the form of a prophecy: ‘...he [the Messiah] will mount on clouds and journey to the house of heaven leaving to the world the account of the gospel.’<sup>603</sup> The cloud serves as the vehicle of the ascent, a typical element in the Hellenistic and Jewish rapture stories.<sup>604</sup> The fact that the Ascension in early Christianity was understood as a part of the glorification of Jesus (resurrection-ascension) is also testified by the *Testament of Benjamin*, where the Saviour ‘shall ascend from Hades and shall pass on from earth to heaven.’<sup>605</sup> The ascent from Hades is mentioned also in the second part of the *Gospel of Nicodemus, Christ’s Descent into Hell* 1(17).1<sup>606</sup> and the *Testament of Benjamin* 9:3,<sup>607</sup> and may reflect an old Christian tradition.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> RUBINKIEWICZ, in *OTP* 1: 696.

<sup>599</sup> DEAN-OTTING 1984: 248-255; FUJITA 1986: 173.

<sup>600</sup> Probably composed originally in Greek in the second century A.D., the writing is known only in Christian translations. *OTP* 1: 909.

<sup>601</sup> *OTP* 1: 916. Cf. GrApEzra 5:7.

<sup>602</sup> The SibOr consists of an original Jewish oracle and an extensive Christian redaction. The passage follows after the first seven generations of the Jewish Oracle and describes the incarnation and career of Christ. The Christian interpolation was probably made in the late second century.

<sup>603</sup> COLLINS, *OTP* 1: 343.

<sup>604</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 104.

<sup>605</sup> TBenj 9:3, in KEE, *OTP* 1: 827.

<sup>606</sup> ELLIOTT 1993: 190, 198.

<sup>607</sup> *OTP* 1: 827.

<sup>608</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 105-106.

Among the extra-canonical writings, two texts are of great interest for the discussion of the reception of the Lukan ascension narrative. In the *Acts of Pilate*<sup>609</sup> 14:1, the day of the Ascension seems to coincide with the day of the resurrection.<sup>610</sup> Recording a testimony of rabbi Phineës, the author writes: ‘And while Jesus was still speaking to his disciples, we saw him taken up into heaven.’<sup>611</sup> This description seems to rely on Lk 24:50, but the author of ActPil also shows knowledge of Acts when he records the Ascension as taking place on a mountain and Jesus departing on a cloud in ActPhil 16:6.<sup>612</sup> Jesus’ visible translation is compared here with the ascension of Enoch implied in Gen 5. A visible Ascension of Christ is also found in the *Epistle of the Apostles* 51:<sup>613</sup> ‘And as he spoke, there was thunder and lightning and an earthquake, and the heavens divided and a bright cloud came and took him away.’ Again, the Ascension is described in terms of exaltation kerygma (on the day of the resurrection), with extensive use of apocalyptic motifs.<sup>614</sup> Nonetheless, this pericope shows a probable dependence on the Ascension accounts in Luke-Acts.<sup>615</sup>

## 4.2 The Reception of the Ascension in Early Christian Writers

The question of the reception of the Ascension story as presented by Luke was until recently ignored. However, a first attempt to identify the use of Luke-Acts in early Christianity (second century) was made by Andrew Gregory in his doctoral thesis. He concludes by stating that ‘the earliest external evidence for *Luke* can be dated no earlier than the activity of Marcion and Justin in the mid second-century, which means only that it must have been written in some form by c. 140. Certain attestation for *Acts* is later, but it may be dated securely to probably not much later than the middle of the

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<sup>609</sup> ActPil was probably composed in Greek and its dating is uncertain. However, the majority of scholars consider it to go back to the fifth-sixth century, although the material is certainly much older. Cf. ELLIOTT 1993: 164-166; HENNECKE 1963: 444-449.

<sup>610</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 143.

<sup>611</sup> ELLIOTT 1993: 179.

<sup>612</sup> PARSONS 1987: 145; LOHFINK 1971: 133. However, it is also possible that the author of ActPhil may have drawn from another source (probably Matt 28:16-20) as the three rabbis, Agas, Phineës and Angaeus, witness the Ascension from Mount Mamlich (Galilee) and not from the Mount of Olives (Jerusalem). Cf. LEIBNER 2009: 174-175.

<sup>613</sup> Also referred to as *Epistula Apostolorum*, the text is generally dated to the second century. Cf. HENNECKE 1963: 189-191.

<sup>614</sup> As LOHFINK (1971: 130-133) suggests, the time of the Ascension on the resurrection Day, ‘after three days and three hours’, may be dependent on Mk 16:3 (Codex *Bobiensis*).

<sup>615</sup> BOVON 2005: 386.

second century if it was written – as seems all but certain – by the same author as *Luke*, and this coheres with *Acts* being known and used by the time of Irenaeus.<sup>616</sup> By this he does not imply that these texts were not used prior to the dates above, but that there is no external evidence to be found in supporting this idea. In fact, the same may be said with regard to all New Testament books: until the mid second-century no citations from NT can be found, and only in a few cases some allusions may be traced, probably based on common traditions.<sup>617</sup> This can be easily explained through the extensive use of oral tradition still alive in that early Christian period.

The use of Luke in the first half of the second century was minimal, as observed by Arthur Bellinzoni. He notes that ‘for the first half of the second century, the sources of Jesus’ traditions seem to have been oral tradition or pregospel collections of traditions. There was apparently little or no significant use of the Gospel of Luke before 150.’<sup>618</sup> François Bovon identifies a list of 17 writings from the second century that witness certain knowledge of passages from Luke’s Gospel or used it as their source.<sup>619</sup> In response to Bovon’s analysis, Gregory draws attention to the fact that these authors might have drawn on a tradition used also by Luke. ‘If such material originates with Luke, then “parallels” in later texts may reflect the dependence on his account. If Luke reproduces earlier traditions, such “parallels” may reflect the independent use of shared traditions, not the dependence of a later author on Luke.’<sup>620</sup> Like Bovon, he finds evidence for the reception of Acts in three apocryphal *Acts* from the second century.<sup>621</sup>

Gregory emphasises the reception of Luke’s gospel saying that ‘only with Marcion, Tatian and Irenaeus (and perhaps Valentinus) is the evidence sufficient to demonstrate

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<sup>616</sup> GREGORY 2003: 353.

<sup>617</sup> Barbara ALAND (1989: 1) records that ‘was die Evangelien betrifft, so ist es sachgemäßer, bis etwa zur Mitte des 2. Jahrhunderts gar nicht von Zitaten zu reden, sondern von der Weitergabe des synoptischen Stoffes durch die umprägende, neu formulierende sowie Neues hinzufügende und erweiternde Kraft der lebendigen, vom Geist erfüllten Gemeinde und ihrer Predigt.’

<sup>618</sup> BELLINZONI 1998: 61.

<sup>619</sup> He mentions the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, the *Gospel of Peter*, the so-called *Unknown Gospel* (fragments of Papyrus Egerton 2), the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Traditions of Matthias* (cited by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromata* 2.45.4, 3.26.3, 7.82.1), *Papyrus Cairensis* 10735, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Questions of Bartholomew*, the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the ‘longer ending’ of Mark, *Codex Bezae* (in which the author tries ‘to bring Luke’s Gospel closer to Matthew’s’), the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Infancy Gospel according to Thomas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, *Sibylline Oracles*. Most of these texts recount the ‘birth story’ in a similar way as Luke. BOVON 2005: 382-389.

<sup>620</sup> GREGORY 2005: 405. Cf. GREGORY 2003: 350.

<sup>621</sup> The *Acts of Paul*, the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of John*. Cf. GREGORY 2003: 343-349.

that *Luke* was used as a continuous whole in something like the form in which it is known today. Only with Irenaeus is the evidence sufficient to demonstrate that the third Gospel is treated explicitly under the title *Luke*<sup>622</sup> and as one of four definitive accounts of the life of Jesus that are to be held in tension with each other.<sup>623</sup> It is easily observed that by the middle of the second century, Luke-Acts were known but their influence within the Christian communities was minimal. Irenaeus mentions that the Gospel of Luke (in an incomplete form) was used by Marcion.<sup>624</sup> Bovon argues that Marcion might have received Luke's Gospel in Pontus, because 'Rome does not seem to know the third gospel until the middle of the century; *1 Clement* and *Hermas* show no knowledge of it at all.'<sup>625</sup> The importance of Luke's gospel in Marcion's thought is also confirmed by his *Gospel*, which represents an edited form of *Luke*.<sup>626</sup> However, no mention of the Ascension is found in Marcion's *Gospel*.<sup>627</sup> Bellinzoni notes that 'what is significant about Marcion for our purposes is his elevation of the Gospel of Luke and Paul's letters to the status of Scripture and his simultaneous rejection of the Jewish Scriptures. Before Marcion, no canon of the New Testament existed, and probably no thought of one.'<sup>628</sup>

Justin Martyr, the most important second-century Christian apologist, used both oral tradition and written sources (such as Matthew and Luke) in his writings. He extensively refers to the Ascension and seems to be acquainted with the Lukan description.<sup>629</sup> Bovon draws attention to the fact that the Luke-Acts also attracted the attention of the Gnostics, and that 'nearly all the Gnostic schools had an ongoing interest in Luke's Gospel.'<sup>630</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> He notes in *Adversus Haereses* 3.1.1-11 that 'Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel that was preached by him.' Also the Book of Acts received its title only in the second century. Cf. STERLING 1992: 314.

<sup>623</sup> GREGORY 2003: 297.

<sup>624</sup> *Adversus Haereses* 3.11.7. BELLINZONI 1998: 62: 'In undermining the authority of the Jewish Bible, Marcion needed to substitute another scriptural authority for use in the Christian churches, and so he created a new edition of the Gospel of Luke and the ten Pauline letters to purify them of what he regarded as later additions. Marcion's version of the Gospel of Luke followed the accepted procedures of the period by reworking and editing the ancient text.' Cf. GREGORY 2005: 409.

<sup>625</sup> BOVON 2005: 396.

<sup>626</sup> Cf. HENNECKE; SCHNEEMELCHER 1963: 348-349.

<sup>627</sup> TYSON 2006: 45-46.

<sup>628</sup> BELLINZONI 1998: 63.

<sup>629</sup> BOVON 2005: 395.

<sup>630</sup> BOVON 2005: 392; cf. GREGORY 2005: 409.

However, it was only with Irenaeus and the first attempts to form a NT canon that the two Lukan books gained universal recognition in the present form.<sup>631</sup> Irenaeus, the most important Christian writer of the second century, as cited by Eusebius, affirmed that he heard Polycarp of Smyrna (ca. 69-155) as a boy, receiving the Gospel tradition orally.<sup>632</sup> Although this tradition is highly questionable, Polycarp is said to have received the tradition from the Apostle John as his disciple and this conferred him legitimacy: the tradition he received was apostolic and, therefore, orthodox (authentic).<sup>633</sup> We can assume that in the period prior to Irenaeus the oral tradition was more influential than the written one. As Gregory asserts: 'texts such as Luke [or/and Acts] were recognized to be authoritative precisely because they were in agreement with the living and apostolic tradition, not vice versa.'<sup>634</sup> Irenaeus pointed to Scriptures (both Jewish and Christian) as a proof of orthodox Christianity against heresies and implicitly emphasised the necessity of a NT canon.<sup>635</sup>

In conclusion, it is difficult to establish a reception of Luke-Acts in the second century, but it does not mean that the second-century authors did not use the Lukan writings.<sup>636</sup> Beginning with the third century, the Ascension starts to be seen as a central event of the History of Redemption (along with the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit)

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<sup>631</sup> 'To be considered as canonical, a document had to pass three tests: (1) it had to have been written by an apostle or by an immediate disciple of an apostle; (2) it had to be recognized as authentic by at least one leading ecclesiastical community in the ancient Church; and (3) it had to be consistent with apostolic doctrine – that is, with the rule of faith preserved in the living tradition of the Church. During the second and third centuries – largely through the efforts of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Hippolytus of Rome, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen – the idea of a New Testament canon was established, but the constitution of a canon was widely disputed.' CRONK 1982: 123.

<sup>632</sup> 'And there is Polycarp, who not only was taught by the apostles and conversed with many who had seen the Lord, but also was established by apostles in Asia in the church at Smyrna. We ourselves saw him in our early youth, for he lived long and was in extreme old age when he left this life in a most glorious and most noble martyrdom. He always taught the doctrine he had learned from the apostles, which he delivered to the church, and it alone is true.' IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* III.4, in GRANT 1997: 126. Cf. EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20, in DEFERRARI 1953: 329.

<sup>633</sup> Luke himself drew on both written and oral tradition and there is a 'strong possibility (perhaps the probability) that Luke included in his narrative very little that was not known elsewhere, at least among others with whom he may have shared some of the traditions to which he was privy before he committed them to writing.' GREGORY 2005: 403.

<sup>634</sup> GREGORY 2005: 410.

<sup>635</sup> 'In determining the canonicity of the Christian writings, Irenaeus insisted that both apostolicity and ecclesiastical tradition should be demonstrated (*Adv. Haer.* 5.20.2). He referred to two such groups of Christian writings: the four gospels and the writings of the apostles.' BELLINZONI 1998: 72.

<sup>636</sup> GREGORY 2005: 406: 'I agree with Bovon that we cannot demonstrate that many second-century authors knew Luke, and I am perhaps more cautious than he is on this question. But the fact that second-century authors may not leave evidence that allows us to demonstrate their use of Luke does not mean that they did not use it.'

within the early Christian church.<sup>637</sup> In the following sections the references to the departure of Christ in the early Christian writings will be analysed (the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and Ante-Nicene authors until Eusebius of Caesarea).

#### 4.2.1 The Apostolic Fathers

The references to the Ascension in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers are few, often implied rather than explicitly formulated.<sup>638</sup> Their purpose was not to interpret the apostolic tradition but to affirm it. 'It is not surprising then to find a discernible echo of the Apostolic preaching in these documents, although they have the character, not only of systematic expositions of the Christian faith, but of occasional utterances, pastoral in intent.'<sup>639</sup> In four of the Apostolic Fathers some references or allusions to the Ascension of Jesus can be found: Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp and the author of *The Epistle of Barnabas*.

Although Clement does not mention the Ascension anywhere in his *Epistle to the Corinthians*, two important elements of the early Ascension kerygma can be identified. First, in discussing the Salvation brought by Christ, the author cites Ps 110.1 in 1Clem 36:5. As I pointed out before, in early Christian thought this psalm was connected with the Ascension as a prophecy on the enthronement and glorification of Christ in heaven (Mk 16:19; cf. Heb 1:13).<sup>640</sup> An allusion to Jesus' Ascension was identified by Lohfink in 1Clem 42:3, where the author notes that the Apostles were instructed by Jesus after his resurrection (and also 'fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ'<sup>641</sup>) before commencing their mission of preaching the Gospel. Even though the Ascension is not mentioned, Clement records the fact that the Apostles received the Holy Spirit after Christ's resurrection and departure, being in this way prepared to fulfil their promise to preach Jesus' Gospel.<sup>642</sup> Lohfink concludes observing that 'Clement follows

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<sup>637</sup> Cf. LOHFINK 1971: 104.

<sup>638</sup> LARRAÑAGA 1938: 492.

<sup>639</sup> DAVIES 1958: 69.

<sup>640</sup> 'Klemens spricht wenigstens an einer Stelle von der (unsichtbaren) Erhöhung Jesu zur Rechten Gottes. Er zitiert nämlich in Kapitel 36 die Psalmen 2:7 und 109:1 im Anschluss an Hebr 1.' LOHFINK 1971: 100.

<sup>641</sup> HOLMES 2007: 101.

<sup>642</sup> 'Hier hätte die Formulierung nahegelegen, daß die Apostel *nach der Himmelfahrt Jesu* in der Fülle des Heiligen Geistes ausgezogen seien. Eine Erwähnung der Himmelfahrt fehlt jedoch.' LOHFINK 1971: 99.

the early Christian Ascension-kerygma, as we have found outside the Lukan writings in the New Testament. Of a visible ascension of Jesus, he seems to know nothing.’<sup>643</sup>

In the seven letters of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, the first reference to the Ascension is found in the *Epistle to the Magnesians* 7:2 (c. 110), where the author follows a Johannine schema: at the end of his mission Jesus Christ returns to the Father from whom he came into the world.<sup>644</sup> However, following this there is no visible ascension meant in IgnMagn 7:2. In his *Epistle to the Trallians* 9:2, the author affirms that Jesus was raised up by the Father (from the dead) as an act of vindication.<sup>645</sup> The Ascension is not mentioned but implied.<sup>646</sup> The next reference among Ignatius’ letters is the text from the *Epistle to the Smyrneans* 3:3: ‘And after his resurrection he ate and drank with them like one who is composed of flesh, although spiritually he was united with the Father.’<sup>647</sup> The text underlines the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ.<sup>648</sup> Although Hugo Koch sees in this verse the Ascension to the Father as being implied, Larrañaga thinks that the words πνευματικῶς ἡνωμένος are meant to express only the unity between the divine nature of Jesus and the Father.<sup>649</sup> The humanity of Christ was not yet exalted, as he was still with the Apostles on earth.<sup>650</sup> Lohfink thinks that

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<sup>643</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 100.

<sup>644</sup> ‘Ainsi, prétendre, d’après cette formule que saint Ignace applique à toute la vie terrestre de Jésus, qu’il s’agit là d’une union plus grande du Fils avec le Père comme conséquence de l’ascension corporelle du Christ au jour de Pâques, c’est introduire dans le texte des idées qui n’y sont point. Le fait que Jésus a mangé et bu avec ses disciples n’est pas précisé, parce que son union avec le Père est autre qu’elle n’était auparavant, mais uniquement à cause de la force de vérité que ce détail donne à la résurrection corporelle du Christ: c’est ce que l’évêque d’Antioche a voulu souligner ici.’ LARRAÑAGA 1938: 498. Cf. DAVIES 1958: 69.

<sup>645</sup> Cf. ZWIEP 1997: 123.

<sup>646</sup> ‘Man geht also besser davon aus, daß der Himmelfahrt Jesu bei Ignatius grundsätzlich keine andere Funktion zukommt als in der älteren, urchristlichen Tradition. Sie kann genannt werden, kann aber auch fehlen, und sie ist vor allem noch kein festes Heilsdatum im christologischen Kerygma.’ LOHFINK 1971: 102.

<sup>647</sup> HOLMES, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 251. The long recension reads: ‘And thus was He, with the flesh, received up in their sight unto Him that sent Him, being with that same flesh to come again, accompanied by glory and power. For, say the [holy] oracles, “This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen Him go unto heaven.”’ IgnSmyrn 3, in ANCL 1: 243. It has been widely recognised that this ‘long recension’ represents an interpolated version of the original (probably in the 4<sup>th</sup> century). Nonetheless, it expresses the Christian thought and reception of the Ascension tradition in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and also testifies on the fact that this text was regarded as referring to the Ascension.

<sup>648</sup> Cf. ZWIEP 1997: 101.

<sup>649</sup> LARRAÑAGA 1938: 494. Cf. LOHFINK 1971: 102.

<sup>650</sup> ‘Dans cette période intermédiaire des apparitions, il montre le Christ uni au Père dans sa divinité, mais non dans son humanité; c’est pour cela qu’il mange encore et qu’il boit avec ses disciples comme aux

IgnSmyrn 3:3 records the early tradition of the Ascension on Easter day.<sup>651</sup> The parallels with Lk 24:41b-43 are clear but, nevertheless, seem to suggest that Ignatius drew on a source similar to or even used by Luke.<sup>652</sup> Gregory stresses that ‘there is no compelling reason to suggest that Ignatius drew on *Luke*, and there are strong, if not compelling, reasons to suggest that he may not have done... Thus already at an early stage in the second century the witness of Ignatius illustrates and reinforces the methodological point that the use of *Luke*-like material need not provide evidence of the knowledge and use of *Luke*.’<sup>653</sup> In conclusion, one can say that Ignatius took over a primitive *exaltation* tradition which does not witness any post-resurrection appearance or a visible ascension of Christ.<sup>654</sup>

The same tradition may be found also in Polycarp’s *Letter to the Philippians*, where the author does not recount a visible departure of Jesus but mentions that God ‘raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory and a throne at his right hand’ (PolPhil 2:1).<sup>655</sup> Zwiep sees in the kerygmatic formulae τὸν ἐγείραντα τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν one of the ‘oldest recoverable articulations of resurrection faith’.<sup>656</sup> Also, as in the case of the other aforementioned texts, it is difficult to identify whether or not Polycarp draws on Lukan tradition.<sup>657</sup>

Finally, the most relevant text for the present discussion is the *Epistle of Barnabas*. In 15:9, as an argument for the Christian liturgical celebration on Sunday, the resurrection

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jours de sa vie mortelle, parce que son humanité, même glorifiée, n’est pas encore montée au ciel.’ LARRAÑAGA 1938: 496.

<sup>651</sup> ‘Es ist nicht zeitlos gemeint, sondern soll besagen: *Seitdem* Jesus im Vater ist – also seit seinem Unsichtbarwerden – tritt er um so mehr in Erscheinung. Denn das eigentlich Wesenhafte und Wirkende ist nicht das Sichtbare, sondern ruht im Unsichtbaren... Es meint die durch die Erhöhung in ein neues Stadium tretende Einigung mit dem Vater. IgnSm 3:3 belegt deshalb keineswegs einen Zwischenzustand Jesu nach der Auferstehung, in dem seine »Menschheit« noch nicht in den Himmel aufgefahren ist. Vielmehr setzt die Stelle genau wie IgnMagn 7:2 die urchristliche Erhöhungsauffassung – wenn auch verdeckt durch eine andere Terminologie – als selbstverständlich voraus.’ LOHFINK 1971: 103.

<sup>652</sup> Cf. KÖSTER 1957: 45-50.

<sup>653</sup> GREGORY 2003: 74.

<sup>654</sup> ‘Steht Ignatius auf dem Boden des urchristlichen Erhöhungskerigmas. Von einem Zwischenzustand Jesu nach der Auferstehung, der mit einer sichtbaren Himmelfahrt schloß, scheint er nichts zu wissen. Sollte er aber das Lukasevangelium gekannt haben, so ist auffälliger, daß er der lukanischen Konzeption in seinen Briefen keinerlei Platz einräumt.’ LOHFINK 1971: 104.

<sup>655</sup> HOLMES 2007: 283.

<sup>656</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 123.

<sup>657</sup> GREGORY (2003: 314), after analysing the possibility of a dependence on Acts, concludes by saying: ‘Therefore it does not seem possible to adduce Polycarp as a witness to the knowledge and use of *Acts*, although of course the possibility that he knew *Acts* cannot be excluded.’



and the Ascension are dated on the same day, on the eighth day (Easter Sunday).<sup>658</sup> ‘This is why we spend the eighth day in celebration, the day on which Jesus both arose from the dead and, after appearing again, ascended into heaven.’<sup>659</sup>

Leslie William Barnard writes that the author of Barn 15:9 linked the Ascension (and the post-resurrection appearances) to the resurrection without any consideration of the chronological interval between them.<sup>660</sup> Zwiep, however, gives a better explanation: ‘The “ascension” in the sequence “resurrection-manifestation-ascension” is not an *Entrückung* (*in concreto*, the visible ascension of Acts 1:9) but a heavenly journey, which portrays Christ’s victory over death in a single continuous movement from resurrection via a heavenly journey (φανερῶθεις may be taken as “manifested to the heavenly powers”, cf. 1Tim 3:16 ὡφθη ἀγγέλοις!) to heaven.’<sup>661</sup> The celebration of the Ascension on the same day with the resurrection is thus part of the primitive exaltation kerygma (cf. Lk 24:51; John 20:17; EpAp 51; EvPe 56, etc.).<sup>662</sup> According to Lohfink (who in this matter follows Helmut Köster) the text of Barn 15 is probably dependent on Lk 24, or at least on a source common to both.<sup>663</sup> On the other hand, Parsons sees no dependence on Luke-Acts at all and suggests that Barn 15:9 reflects an independent tradition.<sup>664</sup> Yet Gregory agrees with Zwiep’s opinion saying that ‘this text is better construed as a reference to Christ’s manifestation in the heavenly world [and this]

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<sup>658</sup> LOHFINK (1971: 121) argues that ‘nicht der Ostersonntag, sondern ein späterer Sonntag sei hier als Tag der Himmelfahrt angenommen.’ However, this view cannot be sustained as long as, according to Barn 15:9, on the eighth day not only the Ascension, but also the resurrection and the appearances happened.

<sup>659</sup> HOLMES 2007: 429.

<sup>660</sup> BARNARD 1968: 106-107.

<sup>661</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 143.

<sup>662</sup> ‘What we have here is a reminiscence of the original Easter kerygma, in which Jesus’ resurrection was understood in terms of his heavenly exaltation. Barnabas, then, moves entirely within the sphere of the primitive Christian exaltation kerygma and cannot be taken as proof of a pre-Lukan rapture (visible ascension) tradition.’ ZWIEP 1997: 191. Cf. LARRAÑAGA 1938: 498-509.

<sup>663</sup> ‘Die Möglichkeit, daß die auffälligen Übereinstimmungen zwischen Lk 24 und Barn 15 vielleicht doch durch eine gemeinsame ältere Tradition mit Ostertermin bedingt sind, kann nicht ganz ausgeschlossen werden.’ LOHFINK 1971: 125. Cf. KÖSTER 1957: 148: ‘Aus alledem folgt eindeutig, daß die Erwähnung der Himmelfahrt erst sehr spät auftaucht, und zwar offenbar erstmalig in bekenntnisähnlichen Formulierungen, in denen, wie in den späteren kirchlichen Bekenntnissen, die Angabe einer Zeitspanne zwischen Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt fehlt. Die wahrscheinlichste Erklärung für Barn. 15:9 ist demnach, daß er von solchen Gemeindebekenntnissen abhängig ist, in denen Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt einfach hintereinander genannt waren. Sehr unwahrscheinlich ist die Vermutung, Barn. habe sich den Zusammenfall beider Ereignisse nach dem Luk.-Evangelium ausgerechnet.’

<sup>664</sup> ‘The lack of any firm evidence for a literary dependence of *Barnabas* on Luke-Acts leads to the conclusion that, in fact, *Barnabas* reflects an ascension tradition of independent stature. This tradition may be a common, older one from which both *Barnabas* and Luke draw, but there is no convincing argument that one (*Barnabas*) was derived from the other (Luke).’ PARSONS 1987: 147.

provides a better explanation than that of either Lohfink or Parsons however, which means in turn that *Barnabas* cannot be accepted as evidence of a pre-Lukan visible ascension tradition.’<sup>665</sup>

In conclusion to the analysis of reception of the Ascension in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, it is difficult to establish whether these authors draw on Lukan traditions or on common sources. Zwiép concludes affirming that ‘it cannot be demonstrated positively that there was ever a rapture *narrative* before Luke’ but also that ‘this is not to say that Luke has “invented” the ascension.’<sup>666</sup>

#### 4.2.2 The Ante-Nicene Fathers

Analysing the doctrine and interpretation of the Ascension event in the pre-Nicene Church, Davies observes that ‘there is sufficient evidence to make it plain that both Jewish and pagan assailants of Christianity were not unaware of its teaching concerning the Ascension, and for this reason Justin Martyr and, later, Tertullian and Origen, sought to defend it against attack. The arguments they propounded are scarcely self-consistent when taken together, but as separate *argument ad hominem* they doubtless had their weight.’<sup>667</sup>

The most important witness to the Ascension in the second century is **Justin the Martyr** (c. 103-165).<sup>668</sup> He probably draws on Luke’s accounts as the parallels between his descriptions and Luke-Acts accounts are striking. Both in *First Apology* and in the *Dialogues*, Justin makes extensive use of the Ascension, as a separate event from the resurrection, to confirm the bodily resurrection and humanity of Christ.<sup>669</sup> Also, in one extant fragment from his lost treatise *On the Resurrection* he records that ‘when He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the flesh, wishing to show them this also, that it is not impossible for flesh to ascend into heaven (as He had said that our dwelling-place is in heaven), “He was taken up into heaven while they beheld,” as He

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<sup>665</sup> GREGORY 2003: 290.

<sup>666</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 192.

<sup>667</sup> DAVIES 1958: 71.

<sup>668</sup> DAVIES 1958: 71: ‘The fullest witness to the Ascension is provided by Justin Martyr.’

<sup>669</sup> Cf. *Apol.* 1, 21; 31; 42; 45; 46; 50; 51; 54; *Dial.* 17, 1; 32,3; 34,2; 36,5; 38,1; 39,7; 63,1; 82,1; 85,1-2; 108,2; 126,1; 132,1.

was in the flesh.’<sup>670</sup> As Gregory observes, ‘Justin Martyr refers frequently to the ascension, and it appears to have been central to his understanding of Jesus.’<sup>671</sup>

In *Apol.* 1,50 he writes that when Christ ‘had risen from the dead and appeared to them [the disciples], and had taught them to read the prophecies, in which all these things were predicted as coming to pass, and when they had seen Him ascending into heaven, and had believed, and received power which he had sent from there, and went to every race of men and women, they taught these things and were called Apostles.’<sup>672</sup> In this passage Justin describes a visible Ascension,<sup>673</sup> undoubtedly distinguished from the resurrection through the mention of the post-resurrection appearances. Also, it shows his use of the OT prophecies which he sees accomplished in Christ.<sup>674</sup> According to Gregory (who follows Lohfink in this respect) *Apol.* 1,50 provides strong evidence that Justin was familiar to and drawn on Lukan Ascension accounts but, however, he remains prudent in this matter.<sup>675</sup>

Justin also makes explicit reference to the Ascension in his creedal statement from *Apol.* 1, 21, saying: ‘And when we say also that the Word, who is the First-begotten of God, was born for us without sexual union, Jesus Christ our teacher, and that He was crucified and died and rose again and ascended into heaven...’<sup>676</sup> As Davies observes, ‘this same formula, in almost identical words, is to be found repeated in no fewer than seven other

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<sup>670</sup> JUSTIN MARTYR, *Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection* 9, in *ANCL* 2: 352.

<sup>671</sup> GREGORY 2003: 287; cf. LARRAÑAGA 1938: 503-505.

<sup>672</sup> JUSTIN MARTYR, *Apol.* 1, 50, in BARNARD 1997: 58.

<sup>673</sup> ‘Hier ist nun allerdings so eindeutig von einer Himmelfahrt vor den Augen der Apostel die Rede, daß alle anderen Belege bei Justin von dieser Stelle aus interpretiert werden müssen.’ LOHFINK, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu*, p. 110. Cf. BARRETT 1994: 42.

<sup>674</sup> Justin associates the psalms 68 and 110 with the Ascension (*Apol.* 1, 45; *Dial.* 32.6; 36.5; 39.4; 56.14; 83.1; 87.6; 127.5), traditionally regarded as prophecies to Christ’s exaltation. To these he adds three other psalms: 19 (*Dial.* 69.3), 24 (*Apol.* 1, 51; *Dial.* 36; 85.1) and 47 (*Dial.* 32.2-7). Cf. DAVIES 1958: 72-73; GREGORY 2003: 287; ZWIEP 1997: 120 n. 2.

<sup>675</sup> ‘This passage has been used to suggest that Justin knew *Acts* but it might also (or instead) presuppose *Luke* 24:50-53, at least in its longer form. Perhaps in favour of Justin’s presupposing *Luke* is the continuity between his account of Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching and his account of the ascension, although of course Justin could draw on *Luke* 24 and *Acts* 1 together. Perhaps in favour of Justin’s presupposing *Acts* is his statement that when the Apostles had seen Jesus ascend, had believed and had received power they went to every race of men and women. This is explicit in *Acts*, but each element might be considered to be implicit in the longer form of *Luke* 24:50-53.’ GREGORY 2003: 288 (cf. also 318-321). Cf. LOHFINK 1971: 110.

<sup>676</sup> JUSTIN MARTYR, *Apol.* 1, 21, in BARNARD 1997: 37.

passages in his works, and there is no reason to doubt that his represents a faithful reproduction of the primitive kerygma in which the Ascension had a necessary place.’<sup>677</sup>

Justin seems to have used the same exaltation tradition as Luke, or even used his works, being the first second century author known to us in whose thought the Ascension event occupies a definite place.<sup>678</sup>

**Melito of Sardis** (d. 180) mentions the Ascension, citing Ps 68:33 and the Song of Solomon 2:8: ‘*The ascent of the Lord* – the raising up of man, who is taken from earth to heaven. In the Psalm: “Who ascended above the heaven of heavens to the east” [Ps 68:33] ... *The transition of the Lord*—His assumption of our flesh, through which by His birth, His death, His resurrection, His ascent into heaven, He made transitions, so to say. In the Song of Songs: “Behold, He comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.”’<sup>679</sup> [Song of Sol 2:8] In Melito’s view the Ascension was the normal ending of Christ’s mission on earth, and by sitting of the right hand of the Father he brought our nature into heaven.<sup>680</sup> The Ascension is mentioned also in his confession of faith found in *Peri Pascha* 104.<sup>681</sup>

**Irenaeus**, bishop of Lugdunum (c. 130/140-c. 202), commenting on the ending of Mark and citing the Ps 110.1, writes: ‘Also, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: “So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sited on the right hand of God;” confirming what had been spoken by the prophet: “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy

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<sup>677</sup> DAVIES 1958: 72; cf. BEHR 2001: 101-102.

<sup>678</sup> ‘Er ist überhaupt innerhalb der uns erhalten gebliebenen Literatur des 2. Jahrhunderts der erste Autor, bei dem die Himmelfahrt einen festen Platz im Christuskerygma einnimmt und bei dem sich mit Sicherheit sagen läßt, daß er die lukanische Himmelfahrtskonzeption übernommen hat. Beachten wir nun angesichts dieses Sachverhalts Folgendes: Justin ist zugleich der erste Autor, bei dem sich eine Kenntnis und Benutzung des lukanischen Doppelwerks wirklich nachweisen läßt. Beides steht natürlich in einem inneren Zusammenhang: Die lukanische Himmelfahrtskonzeption setzt sich zu genau dem Zeitpunkt durch, an dem sich auch die lukanischen Schriften durchsetzen und zitiert werden.’ LOHFINK 1971: 110.

<sup>679</sup> MELITO OF SARDIS, *Fragments from the Oration on Our Lord’s Passion*, in ANCL 22: 137.

<sup>680</sup> DAVIES 1958: 74.

<sup>681</sup> STEWART-SYKES 2001: 66.

footstool.’”<sup>682</sup> Irenaeus, as many other authors before him, situates the Ascension in relation to the resurrection on the same day, Easter Day.<sup>683</sup>

Irenaeus does not quote the Lukan Ascension accounts but clearly uses them in his battle against the Gnostic heresies.<sup>684</sup> He was most certainly familiar with the works of Justin and followed him in preserving ‘certain quasi-credal statements in a more or less stereotyped form, containing distinct references to the Ascension.’<sup>685</sup> Irenaeus’ intention was to argue against docetic and Gnostic heresies, which affirmed that Christ’s descent and ascent were invisible. In his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 83-85, the author extensively discusses the Ascension in terms of exaltation of a new man: ‘Because the Word was made flesh, He was visible in his ascension; and, when the powers saw Him, the angels below cried out to those who were on firmament: *Lift up your gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting gates, that the King of glory may come in.*’<sup>686</sup> Because Christ bears both natures he is recognised by the angelic powers as being as visible to the apostles as he is to the heavenly creatures.<sup>687</sup> Following Lohfink’s view, Zwiep emphasises that ‘it is only as late as Justin (*Apol* 1,50) and Irenaeus (*AdvHaer* I 10,1; II 32,3; III 10,6; 12,1.5; 16,8; 17,2; V 31,2; *Dem* 41; 83; 84) that the Lukan conception is carried through, albeit parallel to the exaltation kerygma, which persisted into the fifth century AD.’<sup>688</sup>

In the works of **Tertullian** (155-c. 220) the Ascension is connected with the eschatological expectation: ‘Who then in so untimely, so unripe, a sort, has summoned the Lord, now at the right hand of God, to shake terribly the earth, as Isaiah says, when, I suppose, it is still intact? Who has already subdued Christ’s enemies under his feet, as

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<sup>682</sup> IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* III 10.6, in *ANCL* 5: 287. In *AH* I 10.1, Irenaeus gives the fullest description of the faith which was received from the apostles in form of a credal statement and includes the bodily ascension. Cf. BEHR 2001: 35.

<sup>683</sup> ‘Irénee situe l’Ascension dans la trame des événements de Pâques. Insérée dans le temps et dans l’espace, elle implique le corps du Seigneur et s’inscrit dans une géographie précise : c’est sur le mont des Oliviers qu’elle a eu lieu, selon la prophétie de David dans le psaume 67 (68).’ CHAIGNON 2008: 119.

<sup>684</sup> ‘Lukas wollte in seinem Doppelwerk den Nachweis erbringen, daß die apostolische Verkündigung von Jesus bis in die eigene Zeit in ungebrochener Kontinuität weitergegeben worden war. Irenäus nimmt diese Zielsetzung auf und arbeitet sie theologisch weiter aus. So ist es nun folgerichtig, daß er auch die Konzeption der Himmelfahrt von Lukas übernimmt und mit besonderer Betonung immer wieder von der nach der Auferstehung vor den Augen der Apostel geschehenen Auffahrt Jesu spricht.’ LOHFINK 1971: 110-111.

<sup>685</sup> DAVIES 1958: 74. Cf. IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* III 6.2, in *ANCL* 5: 270.

<sup>686</sup> IRENAEUS, *On the Apostolic Preaching* 84, in MACKENZIE 2002: 24.

<sup>687</sup> MACKENZIE 2002: 216-218.

<sup>688</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 23; cf. LOHFINK 1971: 111.

David says, as though swifter than the Father, while still every assembly of the proletariat cries out for “Christians to the lion”? Who has perceived Jesus coming down from heaven in like manner as the apostles saw him going up, according to the angels’ decree? Until this present day no tribe unto tribe have smitten their breasts, recognizing him whom they pierced: no one yet has welcomed Elijah, no one yet has fled from Antichrist, no one yet has wept for the death of Babylon.’<sup>689</sup>

Tertullian’s primary interest was to reject the heresies and defend the orthodox Christian belief. The Ascension provides arguments for the reality of the (bodily) Resurrection and offers the premise for a discussion regarding Christ’s status in heaven.<sup>690</sup>

Moreover, the session of Jesus in His incarnate nature at the right hand of God represents a guarantee of the resurrection of our flesh: ‘Jesus is even now sitting there at the right hand of the Father, Man albeit God, the last Adam albeit the primal Word, flesh and blood albeit purer than ours, yet the same in both the substance and the form in which he ascended, in like manner also will descend, as the angels affirm, recognizable in fact by those who have wounded him.’<sup>691</sup>

‘In his *De Resurrectione Carnis* (210-12), which is a companion volume to the *De Carne Christi*, Tertullian opposes four Gnostic sects, those of Marcion, Apelles, Basilides and Valentinus, whose addiction to docetism has led them to deny the reality of Christ’s flesh and of its Resurrection. The Ascension again provides Tertullian with a weapon in his onslaught on this position.’<sup>692</sup>

When speaking about the distinction between the persons of the Holy Trinity, Tertullian stresses that: ‘The Son ascended into the higher parts of heaven, as he did also descend into the inner parts of the earth. This is he who is seated at the right hand of the Father, not the Father at his own right hand. This is he whom Stephen sees, when he is being stoned, still standing at the right hand of God, as thenceforth to sit, until the Father do put all enemies under his feet. This is he who is also to come again above the clouds of

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<sup>689</sup> TERTULLIAN, *On the Resurrection* 22, in EVANS 1960: 61-63.

<sup>690</sup> ‘The exigencies of controversy equally influenced the majority of his references to the Ascension, which he does not so much seek to expound as to use as a weapon in his anti-heretical armoury.’ DAVIES 1958: 82.

<sup>691</sup> TERTULLIAN, *On the Resurrection* 51, in EVANS 1960: 149.

<sup>692</sup> DAVIES 1958: 83.

heaven in like fashion as also he ascended.’<sup>693</sup> The author seeks to defend the orthodoxy from the Modalist or Patripassian heresies, demonstrating that the Ascension proves once again the distinction between the Father and the Son.<sup>694</sup> Furthermore, Tertullian points out that the most appropriate day for baptism is on the feast of Pentecost, because this period also incorporates both the joy of the resurrection and of the Ascension.<sup>695</sup>

**Origen** (185-253), interpreting Jn 20:17, shows his understanding of the Ascension as united with the resurrection (but still two distinct events): ‘For what occurred on the first day in the paradise of God belonged to the resurrection; it was also a part of resurrection when he appeared and said, “Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the father”; but the resurrection was completed when he went to the Father.’<sup>696</sup> And again, on the same pericope, he writes: ‘But after he had destroyed his enemies through his passion, the Lord, who is mighty in battle and strong [cf. Ps 23:8], needing the cleansing for his manly deeds which can be given to him by the Father alone, prevents Mary from touching him saying, “Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and say to my brethren, «I am going to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God».’’<sup>697</sup>

Origen makes extensive use of the Allegorical method of interpretation and, as Davies observes, ‘the Ascension was not spared that allegorization which Origen employed so zealously in his exposition of the Scriptures.’<sup>698</sup> ‘But since, as we said before, after he had performed manly deeds against his adversaries he needed to wash “his robe in wine, and his garment in the blood of the grapes” [cf. Gn 49:11], he went up to the Father, the husbandman of the true vine, that, having washed there after the ascent to the height when he led captivity captive, he might descend bearing various gifts. Among these gifts were the tongues as of fire which were distributed to the apostles, and the holy

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<sup>693</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Against Praxeas* 30, EVANS 1948: 178-179. See also: NOVATIAN, *The Trinity* 26, in DESIMONE 1974: 90-92.

<sup>694</sup> DAVIES 1958: 85-86.

<sup>695</sup> TERTULLIAN, *On Baptism* 19, in EVANS 1964: 41: ‘After that, Pentecost is a most auspicious period for arranging baptisms, for during it our Lord’s resurrection was several times made known among the disciples, and the grace of the Holy Spirit first given, and the hope of our Lord’s coming made evident: because it was at that time, when he had been received back into heaven, that angels said to the apostles that he would so come in like manner as he had also gone up into heaven, namely, at Pentecost.’

<sup>696</sup> ORIGEN, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* 10.245, in HEINE 1989: 309.

<sup>697</sup> ORIGEN, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* 6.287, in HEINE 1989: 246.

<sup>698</sup> DAVIES 1958: 91.

angels who will be present in their every act and will deliver them.’<sup>699</sup> In a fragment of his commentary on Luke, Origen interprets the blessing of Christ, comparing this gesture with Moses rising up his hands: ‘So, if someone has his hands down towards earthly things, he does not intend to bless anyone. So, too, the hands of Moses did not help the people when they were down, but when they were raised up. The raising up of the Saviour’s hands was a symbol of this. By his actions on behalf of man, he saved the believers. Perhaps, therefore, everyone who is raised up by his deeds has been crucified, as Paul wrote: “I am crucified to the world and the world to me” [Gal 6:14]. That is to say, the word about the world has been conceived, thought, and raised on high, and no longer lies below... But, the Lord also lifts up his hands in another way, and bestows power on the disciples through his blessing.’<sup>700</sup>

**Novatian** (c. 200-258) mentions the Ascension insisting on Christ’s two natures: ‘In the same manner, that He, as Man, ascended into heaven, as God, he first descended from heaven. In the same manner that he, as Man, goes to the Father, so as a Son obedient to His Father shall he descend from the Father.’<sup>701</sup> The author connects the ascension of the Son to the Father with the incarnation. Christ descended from the Father as God and took our human nature, and ascended as Man *and* God back to heaven, to the Father. Novatian uses the Ascension to defend the Trinitarian doctrine by showing how the Son incarnate possesses two natures and remains at the same time fully God in heaven.<sup>702</sup> He argued against the Adoptionistic and Nestorian heresies by proving that Jesus is both God and Man, and that the Ascension represents an argument for his divinity (*The Trinity* 11).<sup>703</sup>

**Lactantius** (c. 240-c. 320) interprets the Ascension by making use of the early tradition, citing the prophecy from Dan 7:13: ‘After His preaching of the Gospel and His Name to the disciples was completed, He withdrew Himself suddenly, and the clouds took Him into heaven of the fortieth day after His Passion, just as Daniel had showed would happen when he said: “Lo, one like the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. And he came even to the Ancient of days.” [Dan 7:13] His disciples, however, dispersing

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<sup>699</sup> ORIGEN, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* 6.292, in HEINE 1989: 247.

<sup>700</sup> ORIGEN, *Fragment 257 (on Luke 24:50)*, LIENHARD 1996: 227.

<sup>701</sup> NOVATIAN, *The Trinity* 11.8, in DESIMONE 1974: 49.

<sup>702</sup> ‘Novatian’s sober theology, a not untypical product of the Western mind with its essentially practical character, fell short of the wide range of the Alexandrian speculation.’ DAVIES 1958: 90.

<sup>703</sup> DESIMONE 1970: 82.



through the provinces, made foundations of the Church everywhere, themselves performing great and almost incredible miracles in the name of God, their Master. For as He was departing, He had instructed them in the virtue and power, whereby the plan of the new message might be established and confirmed.’<sup>704</sup> And again, in another place, adding the Ps 110:1 to explain the glorification of the Son of God: ‘Therefore, after His resurrection He went into Galilee, and again assembled His disciples, who had fled through fear; and having given them commands which He wished to be observed, and having arranged for the preaching of the Gospel throughout the whole world, He breathed into them the Holy Spirit, and gave them the power of working miracles, that they might act for the welfare of men as well by deeds as words; and then at length, on the fortieth day, He returned to His Father, being carried up into a cloud. The prophet Daniel [Dan 7:13] had long before shown this, saying, “I saw in the night vision, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days; and they who stood beside Him brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him a kingdom, and glory, and dominion, and all people, tribes, and languages shall serve Him; and His power is an everlasting one, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” Also David in the 109<sup>th</sup> Psalm [LXX]: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool”.’<sup>705</sup>

The great Church historian **Eusebius of Caesarea** (263-339/340), in whose thought the Ascension occupies a central place as the climax of the Saviour’s earthly life,<sup>706</sup> records that Christ ‘performed and suffered such things as were in accord with the prophecies which foretold that One who was both man and God would come to dwell in the world, as the performer of miraculous deeds, and that he would be made manifest to all the Gentiles as the teacher of the worship of the Father, and that the marvel of His birth and His new teaching and the wonder of his deeds, and, in addition to these, the manner of His death and resurrection from the dead, and, above all, His divine ascension into heaven would also be made manifest. Thus Daniel the Prophet, under the influence of the divine Spirit, saw His kingdom in the end and was inspired thus to describe the vision of God in human fashion: “For I beheld,” he says “till thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days sat: his garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like

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<sup>704</sup> LACTANTIUS, *The Divine Institutes* 4.21, in McDONALD 1964: 300-301.

<sup>705</sup> LACTANTIUS, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 47, in ANCL 22: 131-132.

<sup>706</sup> Cf. LARRAÑAGA 1938: 515-522.

clean wool: his throne like flames of fire: the wheels of it like a burning fire. A swift stream of fire issued forth before him: thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him: the judgement sat, and the books were opened.” [Dan 7:9-10] And next he says: “I beheld, and lo, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of days: and he was presented before him. And to him was given power, and glory, and a kingdom, and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve him. His power is an everlasting power that shall not pass away: and his kingdom shall not be destroyed.” [Dan 7:13-14]<sup>707</sup> The Ascension, which in Eusebius’ thought represents the culmination and the fulfilment of all OT messianic prophecies, confirms Christ’s divinity and his glory.<sup>708</sup>

In conclusion, the treatment of the Ascension in the pre-Nicene Christian writers is almost always connected with the session *ad dexteram Dei* and used with apologetic purposes. All the authors discussed above include the Ascension event in their quasi-creedal formulae and only briefly try to interpret it. However, three writers are of special interest in the discussion of interpretation: Novatian associates the Ascension of Christ with the doctrine of *incarnation*, Irenaeus incorporates it into his theory of *recapitulation*, and Origen, making extensive use of the allegorical method, emphasises that a too-literal interpretation of the Lukan narratives of the Ascension could lead to a false understanding of the event *per se*.<sup>709</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.2, in DEFERRARI 1953: 45.

<sup>708</sup> ‘Anche senza aver di mira avversari determinati, i Padri volentieri argomentano dall’ascensione di Cristo la sua divinità. Così Eusebio di Cesarea (*Hist. Eccl.* I 2, 23) scorge nell’ascensione il coronamento degli eventi in cui si compiono le profezie riguardanti il Cristo.’ PELLEGRINO 1954: 60.

<sup>709</sup> DAVIES 1958: 94.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

In the present dissertation I investigated the Ascension of the Messiah as presented by the Evangelist Luke in his two writings. The introduction deals with the history of the research on the subject and the proposed methodology. In identifying the sources used by the author to describe the event, in the second section I started with an analysis of the Jewish writings, both canonical (Enoch in Gen 5; Elijah in 2Kgs 2, Sir 48 and Ps 110) and non-canonical from the Hellenistic-Roman period. The conclusion of this discussion shows that Jewish rapture traditions shared common elements such as a period of instruction and a last discourse before the translation into heaven, the ascension usually necessitates an eschatological function to be fulfilled and that the ascended ones do not experience death. From the biblical accounts of Enoch and Elijah's departures, various ascension stories developed within Jewish mystic and apocalyptic movements. This Jewish rapture tradition seems to represent the base of the Lukan ascension description in Lk 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11, analysed in the third chapter of the present dissertation.

Through a textual and literary analysis I aimed to demonstrate that Christ's Ascension cannot be regarded as simply the last appearance to the disciples and that the different elements presented by Luke (the last instruction, the blessing, the cloud, the angels, etc.) are meant to transmit the glorified status of the resurrected one and his mission. Furthermore, I proposed a theological interpretation based on the patristic exegesis. In comparison with the Jewish raptures the Ascension of Christ is clearly different: the condition of the ascended ones is only temporary whereas Christ's exaltation into heaven represents his return to the Father; the Jewish *rapti* are granted the privilege of sitting in heaven whereas Christ, the Son of God, sits at the right hand of the Father from eternity; God raises only the spirit of the elevated ones whereas Christ exalts the whole human nature and, thus, makes deification possible for humanity. This interpretation resides in the theological significance of the Ascension event, the last recorded action of Jesus on earth. Luke emphasises its great importance through the double description and by placing it at the centre of his writings. It represents the culmination of Christ's work of Redemption and the generative motif for the

commencement of his Church. The Holy Spirit comes in the world only after the Son of God returns to the Father in heaven. In the end of the third chapter, I discussed the apparent inconsistencies between the two Lukan accounts, showing that the distinct purpose and function of each pericope within Luke's narrative lead to their specific place and the different approach of the same event. In the Gospel's finale the Ascension is implicitly described whereas in the introduction of Acts the author explicitly describes the departure of Christ into heaven. He clearly describes a literal ascension and, as Dunn observes, he 'intended to do so.'<sup>710</sup> In Luke's view, the Ascension is both a condition for the gift of the Spirit and an act of vindication. In describing the Ascension, the author was inspired primarily by the OT story of Elijah's rapture (Elijah himself is seen as a precursor of Christ), but it is equally clear that he also charged it with a different significance and greater importance. The dependence in form of Luke-Acts on the Jewish rapture traditions is very probable, but that Luke presented the Ascension as a mere literary device to bring closure to Christ's earthly mission is highly arguable.

The evidence of the patristic interpretation of the Ascension (as a part of the apostolic kerygma) allows us to defend the historicity of the event and dismiss the assumption that Christ's exaltation is merely a myth. This evidence of the Christian writings in the pre-Nicene period was presented and analysed in the fourth chapter, showing that the early authors mentioned the Ascension in all their 'Rule of faith' confessional (creed-like) statements and even tried to interpret it as one of the most important elements in the redemptive work of Christ. Also, the bodily resurrection is confirmed by the physical elevation of Christ and the visible Ascension is affirmed not only by the Lukan accounts, but also by the early Christian kerygma.

However, it can be observed that early Christianity saw Christ's resurrection and departure in unity, as two aspects (or moments) of the exaltation or glorification of the Son of God. This view influenced the liturgical celebration of the feast of Ascension. Consequently, the commemoration of Jesus' return to the Father was placed either on Easter Sunday or at the end of the fifty days (Pentecost). Both these traditions reflect the unity of the Pentecostal period, as an interval in which the joy of the resurrection was celebrated within the early Christian Church. On the one hand, the testimonies of

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<sup>710</sup> DUNN 2001: 312.

*Barnabas* 15:9, the *Apology of Aristides* 2, the *Gospel of Peter* 9:35-39, the *Epistle of the Apostles* 51, and the *Testament of Benjamin* 9:3 represent a tradition that links the Ascension with Easter Day. But on the other hand, another tradition affirms the observance of the Ascension at the end of Pentecost. This independent tradition, probably much later than the former, is to be found in the Syriac *Doctrine (or Teaching) of the Apostles*,<sup>711</sup> Eusebius,<sup>712</sup> and *Itinerarium Egeriae* 43.<sup>713</sup> The celebration of the Ascension on Pentecost was probably introduced in the third century. Although the Canon 43 of the Council of Elvira (A.D. 300) shows that ‘the bridegroom was taken away’ forty days after he was raised from the grave,<sup>714</sup> it was not until the fourth century that the Ascension began to be celebrated as a separate Feast – on the fortieth day after the resurrection, the time of the event as described in Acts 1:3.<sup>715</sup> According to Jean Daniélou, the first mention of the Ascension observance on the day recorded by Luke seems to be in a Homily of Gregory of Nyssa (388).<sup>716</sup> From this point onwards the feast of the bodily Ascension of Jesus into heaven is celebrated separately from the Resurrection or Pentecost. From tradition, the Ascension is seen as one of the great feasts in the Christian liturgical calendar and, until the present day, the Christian Church commemorates the Lord’s return to heaven on a Thursday, the fortieth day from Easter Sunday.<sup>717</sup>

Also, the reception of the Ascension within early Christian thought led to the crystallisation of the doctrine. Although the terminology is sometimes different, the

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<sup>711</sup> In the ninth Canon it is written: ‘Again the Apostles appointed: At the completion of fifty days after his resurrection, make the commemoration of his ascension to his glorious Father.’ *Doctrine of the Apostles*, in CURETON 1864: 27. Cf. WITAKOWSKI 1987: 161-171.

<sup>712</sup> In his *Vita Constantini* he records that the Emperor’s death coincided with the celebration of Christ’s Ascension, on the afternoon of Pentecost day: ‘Each of these events took place during the greatest festival, the utterly sacred and holy Pentecost, honoured with seven weeks and sealed up with a single day, during which divine words describe the ascension into Heaven of the universal Saviour and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon mankind.’ *Life of Constantine* 4.64(1), in CAMERON; HALL 1999: 178.

<sup>713</sup> Cf. DAVIES 1954: 93-100.

<sup>714</sup> TALLEY 1986: 62-63; DAVIES 1958: 192-198.

<sup>715</sup> ‘The commemoration of the Lord’s Ascension on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Easter (in accordance with Luke’s Acts) came into existence at the end of the fourth century or beginning of the fifth century.’ GOUDOEVER 1961: 199; cf. LOHFINK 1971: 137-146.

<sup>716</sup> ‘Par ailleurs les seules indications certaines de l’existence de la fête de l’Ascension au quarantième jour après Pâques sont postérieures à 390. Le sermon de Grégoire, qui paraît en relation avec l’apparition de cette fête ne saurait être très antérieur. Nous pensons donc pouvoir le fixer avec une approximation aussi grande que possible au quarantième jour après Pâques de 388.’ DANIELOU 1970: 666.

<sup>717</sup> In some catholic and orthodox dioceses the Ascension Feast is held on the following Sunday for pastoral reasons.

departure of Christ is included in all the early Christian creeds and confessions of faith.<sup>718</sup> The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) states that our Lord Jesus Christ ‘ascended into heaven, and is seated on the right hand of the Father.’ And this reality, of the glorification of the Son of Man and the exalted status of the human nature was preserved by the Christian tradition through its Creeds and Confessions of faith.

Jesus Christ, the Messiah, did ascend into heaven and the meaning of his Ascension is of great profundity. It cannot be regarded as a mere *finale* of his life and mission on earth; it is more than a spectacular wonder and a well-written story by Luke. The Ascension was necessary for reassuring the audience that the resurrected one did not die, that the living Jesus sits in flesh at the right hand of the Father.<sup>719</sup>

Through the Ascension, the world is not abandoned, as Christ continues his work through the Holy Spirit. So that the Holy Spirit could be sent to earth, it was necessary for Christ to Ascend to the Father. As Oscar Cullmann affirms, ‘after Jesus has left the earth and ascended to heaven, he will not abandon the earth. On the contrary – and this is the primary idea of these speeches – his action on earth will then be much more effective than it was during the time of his incarnation.’<sup>720</sup> Without doubt the Ascension can be regarded as potentially one of the most important episodes in the life of Jesus Christ and one of the central events in the History of Redemption.

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<sup>718</sup> The majority of authors used the active form of ‘He ascended,’ whereas some rendered the passive, ‘He was taken up.’ Cf. DAVIES 1958: 95-97.

<sup>719</sup> Cf. CALVIN, *The Acts of the Apostles* 1:9.

<sup>720</sup> CULLMANN 1963: 232-233.

## APPENDICES

### ***Excursus 1: Hekhalot Literature and Merkabah Mysticism***

The Jewish Hekhalot literature refers to that body of esoteric texts that describe mystical visions of heavens and ecstatic journeys through the *seven palaces* or heavens to the *chariot-throne* of God (merkava or merkabah).<sup>721</sup> This literature was produced after the destruction of the Second Temple (A.D. 70), sometime between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and it is based on Ezekiel's vision of the chariot (Ezek. 1:4-26). Some early Hekhalot traditions witnesses are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (as *The Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice*) dated from the Hasmonean to the Herodian period.<sup>722</sup>

The Hekhalot writings are literary sections of the *Maasei Merkavah* and account the mystical ascents into heaven, usually with the purpose to gain insight into Torah. The Hekhalot tradition is based primarily on the Chariot vision of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1) and the Temple vision of Isaiah (Is. 6). The extant texts are included into four principal works, written between the third and the ninth century: *Hekhalot Zutartey* ('The Lesser Palaces'), *Hekhalot Rabbati*<sup>723</sup> ('The Greater Palaces'), *Ma'aseh Merkabah* ('Account of the Chariot') and *Sepher Hekhalot* ('The Book of Palaces' or 3 Enoch).<sup>724</sup> Michael D. Swartz concludes stating that 'whatever the origins of this remarkable literature, it is important not only for the history of Jewish mysticism, but the history of Judaism in late antiquity as well'.<sup>725</sup>

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<sup>721</sup> 'Since the nineteenth century, scholars have argued that in the rabbinic period small circles of Jews cultivated a type of visionary mysticism that involved the cultivation of visions of the heavens and of ecstatic journeys through the seven *palaces* (*hekhalot*) or layers of the celestial world to the throne-room of God, where he is seated on his *chariot-throne* (*merkava*).' SWARTZ 2006: 393.

<sup>722</sup> 4Q400-407 and 11Q17. FLETCHER-LOUIS (2002: 252) considers the Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice as 'a potentially early witness to the kind of religious experience later attested in the Hekhalot Literature'.

<sup>723</sup> For an examination of ascension motifs in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, see: GOODER 2006: 145-150.

<sup>724</sup> 'The narrators and protagonists are almost always three prominent rabbis of the Tannaitic era: Akiva Ishmael, and Nehuniah ben HaQanah. The texts are clearly pseudepigraphic, written long after the lifetimes of these men, although it is not impossible that some of the Hekhalot traditions go back to their teachings.' DAVILA 2001: 3.

<sup>725</sup> SWARTZ 2006: 420.

### The Third Book of Enoch (Hekhalot)

3 Enoch<sup>726</sup> is an apocryphal writing probably composed in the fifth or the sixth century A.D. related to Merkabah (or Merkavah) literature. It was attributed to Rabbi Ishmael, the famous Palestinian scholar, who became a 'High Priest' after visions of ascension to heaven (d. A.D. 132).<sup>727</sup> The third book of Enoch exists only in Hebrew and contains an edition of a work from the Hekhalot tradition.<sup>728</sup> Even though 3 Enoch is not classified as apocalyptic writing, the book is heavily influenced by the apocalyptic genre, showing impressive relationships with 1 and 2 Enoch.<sup>729</sup> The main themes running through the book of 3 Enoch are the ascension of Enoch into Heaven and his transfiguration into the angel Metatron. P. Alexander stresses that 3 Enoch was composed through the combination of many separate traditions, and this would be the reason for the inconsistency and even contradictions in the compiled text.<sup>730</sup>

The text presents the rapture story of Rabbi Ishmael carried into heaven, and guided there by the angel Metatron (Enoch).<sup>731</sup> After the first two chapters of the Book, the Enoch-Metatron piece begins.<sup>732</sup> The first chapter (Introduction) depicts the ascension of Rabbi Ishmael to heaven to behold the vision of Merkabah (3En 3:1-3). Later on, in 3 Enoch 6:1, Enoch, the son of Jared, relates how and why God lifted him up to heaven together with the *Shekinah* in a storm chariot:

R. Ishmael said: The angel Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, said to me:  
When the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to bring me up (lift me up) to the height, He sent me the Prince 'Anapi'el YHWH and he took me from their midst, before their very eyes, and he conveyed (carried) me in great glory on a fiery chariot with fiery horses and

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<sup>726</sup> The book of 3 Enoch is also known as *The Third Book of Enoch*, *The Book of the Palaces* (*Sefer Hekhalot*), *The Book of Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest*, *The Revelation of Metatron*, and *The Hebrew Book of Enoch*.

<sup>727</sup> EVANS 1992: 24.

<sup>728</sup> 'Sefer Hekhalot, which is formally an apocalypse, reports the revelations of the angel Metatron to R. Ishmael, the hero of many other Hekhalot works.' HIMMELFARB 1991: 83.

<sup>729</sup> OEGEMA 2001: 132.

<sup>730</sup> ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1: 223-224.

<sup>731</sup> In Gen. 5:24, 'Metatron is translated Enoch who was taken up to heaven on account of his having led a perfect life, serving the Holy One *in truth*. He is called the Great Scribe. This is evidently dependent upon Enoch-Metatron traditions, possibly directly upon 3 Enoch, since it combines, as does the Enoch-Metatron Piece, chh. 3-15, the functions of Scribe-Witness and only perfect Saint with reference to the translated Enoch.' ODEBERG 1973: 95.

<sup>732</sup> 3 Enoch is a composite work, written by a number of people over a prolonged period of time; chapters 3-15 represent the oldest and the most important part of the corpus. This part is referred as *Enoch-Metatron piece*, or the *Elevation of Metatron*.



glorious attendants, and he brought (lifted) me up with the Šhekinah to the heavenly heights.<sup>733</sup>

‘Anapi’el YHWH is an archangel, the same who punishes Metatron in 16:5. According to *Hekhalot Rabbati* 23:1, he is one of the gatekeepers of the seventh palace; only the highest archangels carry the tetragrammaton YHWH.<sup>734</sup> As Gooder observes, ‘the purpose of the ascent seems to be for Ishmael to learn certain heavenly secrets such as the origin of Metatron.’<sup>735</sup>

The same story of Enoch’s ascension on the wings of the Šhekinah is resubmitted with little variations in the next chapter (7:1). 3 Enoch is closely related to 2 Enoch; ‘Enoch’s ascent through the seven heavens to God’s throne, where he receives instruction from the archangels in various mysteries, is parallel to Ishmael’s journey in 3 Enoch. The transformation of Enoch provides the closest approximation, outside Merkabah literature to Enoch’s transformation in 3 Enoch 3-15’.<sup>736</sup>

Another short account of Enoch’s ascension can be found in the appendix to 3 Enoch (48C:2), a text taken from the *Alphabet of Aqiba*<sup>737</sup>, and attached later to the third book of Enoch (A and B recensions). The verses 1-9, in the form of an acrostic on the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (‘Āleph), recount the elevation of Enoch and his transformation into the witness of God. This short report appears to be a summary of the longer version of the elevation of Enoch; parallel to 3 Enoch 3-15.

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<sup>733</sup> 3En. 6:1. Translated by ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1: 261.

<sup>734</sup> Cited by ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1: 261 n. 6b.

<sup>735</sup> GOODER 2006: 144.

<sup>736</sup> ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1: 248.

<sup>737</sup> The *Alphabet of Aqiba* is the title of a Midrash on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first letter (‘Āleph) suggests the person of God.

## Excursus 2: The Ascension in the Gospels According to Mark and John

### 2.1 The Ascension of Christ in the Gospel of Mark (16:19-20)

Ὁ μὲν οὖν κύριος Ἰησοῦς μετὰ τὸ λαλῆσαι αὐτοῖς ἀνελήμφθη εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ.	19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.
ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ, τοῦ κυρίου συνεργοῦντος καὶ τὸν λόγον βεβαιοῦντος διὰ τῶν ἐπακολουθούντων σημείων.	20 And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. [Amen.]

The passage in the NT which notes the Ascension of Christ closest to the description from the Gospel of Luke (24:50-53) and the Acts of the Apostles (1:9-11) is that which is part of the so called ‘longer ending’ of Mark’s Gospel (16:9-20).<sup>738</sup>

The majority of Western theologians consider the Mk 16:9-20 passage to be a later interpolation, by another author, which contains a summary of the events which happened after the resurrection.<sup>739</sup> Brevard Childs argues that the longer ending illustrates the reaction to the events described in Mk 16:1-8 and represents the natural prolongation of the story. ‘The longer ending, in addition, functions as a commentary on the first eight verses and plainly rules out interpreting the astonishment and awe of the women in a positive fashion.’<sup>740</sup>

In the majority’s view, the conclusion of the Gospel of Mark (or pseudo-Mark) was added at the beginning of the second century and composed on the basis of the other synoptic gospels.<sup>741</sup> The main arguments would be the existence of some early manuscripts (Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus and some subsequent translations) in which this ending lacks, as well as the internal witnesses (stylistic and linguistic

<sup>738</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 131-132: ‘We have here a clear and unmistakable expression of Jesus’ ascension (*Entückung*) understood in terms of his exaltation or *session ad dexteram Dei*.’

<sup>739</sup> An exception is FARMER (1974), who affirms that, apart from v. 10, this ending (16:9-20) would belong to the Evangelist Mark.

<sup>740</sup> CHILDS 1984: 95.

<sup>741</sup> METZGER 1983: 92.

problems).<sup>742</sup> Despite this, the longer ending gained canonical status at a very early stage. Metzger explain this saying: ‘In short, it appears that the question of canonicity pertains to the document *qua* document, and not to one particular form or version of that document. Translated into modern terms, Churches today accept a wide variety of contemporary versions as the canonical NT, though the versions differ not only as to rendering but also with respect to the presence or absence of certain verses in several of the books (besides the ending of Mark’s Gospel, other significant variations include Luke 22:43-44, John 7:53-8:2, and Acts 8:37).’<sup>743</sup>

From a point of view of continuity, the vocabulary used by the author of the longer ending is different from that used until Mk 16:8, fact which can be explained through the newly approached themes.<sup>744</sup> Just as Paul Nadim Tarazi affirms, ‘the original text of Mark contained no accounts of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances, a fact some have found confusing or hard to accept.’<sup>745</sup> Neither Clement of Alexandria nor Origen seem to have known this conclusion, and Eusebius and Jerome maintain that the traditional longer ending did not exist in the majority of Greek manuscripts that they knew of.<sup>746</sup> However, the aforementioned passage appears at the end of the Gospel in the majority of Western translations as well as in all of the Orthodox ones, and the Church tradition confirms its canonicity.<sup>747</sup> As Brevard Childs affirms, ‘Mark’s Gospel received its canonical shape by the addition of an ending which clearly does not stem from the original author. Yet the addition is not simply a pious gloss attached to one late textual tradition, but rather an early expansion which helped to form the dominant canonical tradition.’<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> For a comprehensive list of MSS that contain different forms of the Markan gospel’s ending, and also an argumentation against the authenticity of the text from 16:9-20, see: METZGER 1994: 102-106. SHEPHERD (2009: 77-97) does an exhaustive analysis of chapter 16 in Codex W, one of the oldest to contain the longer ending (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century), and confirms the interpolation hypothesis.

<sup>743</sup> METZGER 1987: 270.

<sup>744</sup> DANOVE 2003: 123-124: ‘These twelve verses (i.e. Mk 16:9-20) include sixteen examples of words not found in 1:1-16:8, five examples of words which appear earlier but are used in a unique sense, and four unique phrases. Though some divergence in vocabulary and usage may be explained by the difference in the subject matter under consideration, on the whole this study indicates significant problems concerning the continuity between 1:1-16:8 and 16:9-20.’ Some theologians consider the 16:8 as the intended Mark’s ending. Cf. FENTON, 1994: 1-7.

<sup>745</sup> TARAZI 1999: 237.

<sup>746</sup> ‘The earliest form of the Eusebian canons (deriving from Ammonius, early third century) made no provision for readings in Mark beyond 16:8.’ FRANCE 2002: 685.

<sup>747</sup> BROWN; COLLINS, *NJBC* 66:91: 1052.

<sup>748</sup> CHILDS 1984: 94.

For more than 150 years, the majority of biblical commentators have accepted the hypothesis according to which, of the three synoptic gospels, that of Mark is the oldest<sup>749</sup> and it represents the principally used source by Mark and Luke<sup>750</sup> (alongside a mutual, secondary one, conventionally named *Q*).<sup>751</sup> Generally, it is thought to have been written right before the Jewish War (66-73) or right after it.<sup>752</sup>

If the conclusion of the gospel contains elements of an early resurrection tradition or not, it is a question whose answer has yet to reach a consensus. Some authors tend to reject fully the passage as not being of a notable importance.<sup>753</sup> Others, however, are more reserved in evaluating the entire postscript as being a simple addition or synopsis. The latter support the hypothesis according to which Mk 16:9-20 is based on an early, independent resurrection tradition.<sup>754</sup>

Most probably, the author of the postscript relied on a pre-Lukan thread of the Ascension tradition, because numerous common elements with the descriptions from the Gospel of Luke (24:50-53), the Acts of the Apostles (1:2, 9-11) and the Gospel of John (20:17) can be identified.<sup>755</sup> The resurrection tradition, along the lines of which even Mark could have relied on, was attested early, confirmed since the time of Irenaeus.<sup>756</sup> Nevertheless, it is a generally acknowledged idea that Mk 16:19-20 represents a compilation based on the narrations from Luke-Acts and the Gospel of John, even though there is the possibility that the text was transmitted to the author orally and not through direct literary dependence.<sup>757</sup> ‘Thus the spurious Longer Ending of Mark provides us with both an additional witness – one cannot say an independent

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<sup>749</sup> The official position of the Roman-Catholic Church, based on the tradition argument, recognises the Gospel according to Matthew to be the first written gospel and used subsequently as source by Mark and Luke in their writings. Cf. FILSON 1971: 73-75. The orthodox biblical scholar Veselin KESICH (1992: 71) agrees with the generally accepted view and affirms that Mark’s Gospel was probably written before the year 70.

<sup>750</sup> Cf. SCHRAMM 1971: 4-9.

<sup>751</sup> ‘The priority of Mark and the existence of *Q* have been, and still are, widely accepted, and are conveniently denoted by the title *the two-document hypothesis*.’ STYLER 1981: 285. Cf. SMITH 2003: 123-137.

<sup>752</sup> MORITZ 2005: 39.

<sup>753</sup> Among others, see: LOHFINK 1971: 117-124.

<sup>754</sup> Cf. DODD 1957: 9-35; FITZMYER 1985: 1586.

<sup>755</sup> ‘In its present form this verse [i.e. v. 19] postdates Luke-Acts. However, the Markan appendix may contain source material which comes from a pre-Lukan stratum.’ ZWIEP 1997: 189.

<sup>756</sup> ‘Here there can be no doubt concerning the dating of the tradition: it is attested in the main by sources as early as Irenaeus.’ EHRMAN 1993: 232.

<sup>757</sup> CHILDS 1984: 95. Cf. ZWIEP 1997: 189; PARSONS 1987: 146.

witness – to belief in the Ascension in the first century and with a means of understanding Luke’s own witness in the concluding chapter of his Gospel; i.e. the event he is recording is indeed an Ascension.’<sup>758</sup>

In this pericope the resurrection of our Lord on the Mount of Olives is certainly differently described compared to the descriptions of the raptures to heaven in the OT and the inter-testamental writings. The event represents the Ascension of Christ with his body from earth, through divine intervention and in the presence of witnesses.

Verse 19 seems like a combination between the ascension of Elijah and Psalm 110:1 (LXX 109:1). The terminology used by the author recalls the ascension of the prophet Elijah (2Kgs 2:11-12; 1Macc 2:58). Also, unlike the descriptions in Luke-Acts, there is a direct reference made to sitting to the right hand of the Father, interpreted as the fulfilling of the prophecy in Psalm 110:1. Thus, the early interpretation of the Christ’s Ascension presents it as being triumphant and it precedes the sitting to the right hand of the Father, awaiting the second coming.<sup>759</sup> The description of the Ascension is brief: after Christ shows himself to his disciples while they were at the table (16:14) and asks them to preach his Gospel to all the creatures (16:15), he is received into heaven at the right hand of the Father (16:19).

The time during which the event described in Mk 16:19-20 is happening is not clear in the text; the resurrection, the post-resurrection appearances, the Ascension, and sitting at the right hand of the Father all appear to be happening on the same day.<sup>760</sup> The place of the Ascension is not even mentioned; however, from the Lukan descriptions, it is identified with the Mount of Olives, in the North-east of Bethany (Lk 24:50). The chronological arrangement of events in Mark 16 appears to be changed compared to the traditional succession: ‘resurrection – *sessio ad dexteram* – appearances (from heaven) has been altered into: resurrection – appearances – ascension (rapture) – *sessio ad dexteram*.’<sup>761</sup> Thus, it is only after a series of apparitions in front of his disciples after the resurrection, that Christ leaves earth and sits on the divine throne. The period of time between the resurrection and Ascension is an indefinite period of time during

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<sup>758</sup> DAVIES 1958: 43.

<sup>759</sup> COLE 1961: 263.

<sup>760</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 120; GOULD 1975: 307-308.

<sup>761</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 132.

which the Lord is resurrected but has not yet ascended.<sup>762</sup> There is no indication in the text to ascertain the fact that Christ was already in heaven before the description of the Ascension in verse 19.<sup>763</sup> It must be mentioned that, compared to the ascension traditions in the OT, the function of the event is different. It is not about prolonging somebody's life or delaying their death so that they could fulfil an eschatological task in the future, but it represents an act of enthronement at the right hand of God.<sup>764</sup>

In the conclusion of the resurrected Lord's appearances, the great mystery of the Ascension takes place, as a culmination of his work on earth and a premise for the sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Sitting at the right-hand of the Father (*sessio ad dexteram Dei*) is interpreted by the early Church as a natural consequence of the Ascension and is closely linked to it.<sup>765</sup> Also, it refers to a position of power and not at all to a position in a certain time-frame. Augustine affirms that we must not interpret the sitting at the right-hand literally, but spiritually<sup>766</sup> and, that during his stay after being ascended into heaven with the body, he remains omnipresent.<sup>767</sup> Verse 19 represents both a completion of the Lord's mission as well as a culmination point of the entire.<sup>768</sup>

Verse 20 concludes the gospel on a note of peace and spiritual happiness, like verse 53 from the Gospel of Luke (chapter 24).<sup>769</sup> This shows both the obedience which the apostles demonstrate in fulfilling the last command of the Lord, as well as the fulfilment of His promise to help them in their missionary activity. The difference between Luke 24:53 and Mark 16:20 is that, unlike the first which concludes through the description of the disciples in the temple, the Gospel of Mark shows the Church developing in all the margins of the world.<sup>770</sup> The entire narration of the Acts of the Apostles is

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<sup>762</sup> GNILKA 1989: 354.

<sup>763</sup> 'The underlying thought seems to be that the appearances are temporary manifestations of the risen Jesus to his followers, after which he withdrew himself again to some hidden place on earth.' ZWIEP 1997: 133.

<sup>764</sup> Cf. the ascension of Enoch as the Son of Man in 1 Enoch 70-71.

<sup>765</sup> GNILKA 1989: 357.

<sup>766</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Letter 120 to Consentius*, ACCS – NT 2: 255.

<sup>767</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Letter 187 to Dardanus* 10, ACCS – NT 2: 255.

<sup>768</sup> UPTON 2006: 168.

<sup>769</sup> BROWN 1997: 149.

<sup>770</sup> WATSON (1997: 77) stresses that 'only now [after the Ascension] can the gospel of Jesus Christ be preached to all nations; earlier, the confession that Jesus is the Christ had to be kept strictly secret (8:29-30). This drive from secrecy into openness takes place in accordance with the principle that "there is

concentrated in this last verse.<sup>771</sup> ‘The audience is once more and finally identified with the disciples, with whom it experienced a sense of calling right from the very beginning of the gospel (1:16-20; 2:13-14; 3:13-19).’<sup>772</sup> In some manuscripts, the gospel ends with a final *Amen* (16:20b).<sup>773</sup>

Ioannis Karavidopoulos concludes by writing that ‘verses 19-20 contain, on the one hand, the ascension of Christ (which, after Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11, takes place on the Mount of Olives) and, on the other hand, a general declaration of the apostles’ activities – “everywhere”. The Lord, concluding the cycle of earthly activities, returns “there where He was in the beginning”, sits “at the right hand of God” and from there leads history and “work together” on the mission of the disciples, materializing their mission through wonderful deeds (“signs”).’<sup>774</sup>

Many early Christian commentators of the Gospel of Luke connected the Ascension event to the description from Mark 16:19 and thus, to the sitting at the right hand of God; implicitly, of the fulfilling of the prophecy in Psalm 110:1.<sup>775</sup> Tertullian affirmed that the Son ascends to the Father to sit next to him until the coming back to earth on the clouds of the sky, in the same way he ascended.<sup>776</sup>

Mark’s gospel ends with an account of the departure of Christ, and as Dillon also stresses the account very probably is dependent on Luke:<sup>777</sup> ‘Consequently, while many have been won over to the view that, as an event distinct from the resurrection and terminus of the christophanies, the ascension originated in the thought of St. Luke, we should rather keep an open mind towards the possibility, urged by others, that Luke was not the first to recount this terminal episode, hence that either his gospel ending, or the Acts account, or both, rest upon tradition he received.’<sup>778</sup> This, of course, does not suggest that the author of the ‘longer ending’ merely confined himself to the tradition

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nothing hidden except to be manifest” (4:22). The Gospel according to Mark is itself an integral part of this ongoing process of disclosure.’

<sup>771</sup> ‘Dieser Ausblick kann bereits auf ein längeres missionarisches Wirken zurücklenken und dankbar die gewährte Hilfe des Herrn anerkennen.’ COLE 1961: 263.

<sup>772</sup> UPTON 2006: 169.

<sup>773</sup> This word with which the Gospel ends probably served initially as an indicator of the genre, being a text used in the liturgical worship, but also as an element which confirms its canonical authority.

<sup>774</sup> KARAVIDOPOULOS 2001: 347-348.

<sup>775</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 165.

<sup>776</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Against Praxeas* 30, ACCS – NT 2: 254-255.

<sup>777</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 146.

<sup>778</sup> DILLON 1978: 174-175; cf. LOHFINK 1971: 125.

used by Luke. Parsons even suggests that ‘some of this traditional material, including the ascension tradition, may have been from a rather primitive source.’<sup>779</sup>

## 2.2 The Ascension of Christ in the Gospel of John (20:17)

λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς· Μαριάμ· στραφεῖσα ἐκείνη λέγει αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστί· ραββουνι (ὃ λέγεται διδάσκαλε).	16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).
λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς· μή μου ἅπτου, οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα· πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς· ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.	17 Jesus said to her, “Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”
ἔρχεται Μαριάμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἀγγέλλουσα τοῖς μαθηταῖς ὅτι ἐώρακα τὸν κύριον, καὶ ταῦτα εἶπεν αὐτῇ.	18 Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

In the NT, the description of the actual event of the Ascension is found only in the writings of the evangelist Luke (Lk 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11). Concerning the Ascension, Joseph Fitzmyer distinguishes two types of texts: those which allude to the event (Heb 4:14; 9:24; 1Pet 3:22; Rom 10:6-8; Eph 4:7-11 and Jn 20:17) and texts which describe the Ascension (Lk 25:50-51; Acts 1:9-11; Mk 16:19).<sup>780</sup> In the fourth gospel, that of the evangelist John, the Ascension is mentioned in three passages (3:13; 6:62; 20:17)<sup>781</sup>, but without their being a description of temporal and corporal aspects, but rather a theological reality.<sup>782</sup> Even though the bodily Ascension of Jesus into heaven is not explicitly mentioned, through resurrection the author sees the manifestation of Jesus’ glory and the beginning of the Ascension.<sup>783</sup> Analysing the structure of the first section of chapter 20 (vv. 1-2, 11-18), we notice that this is based on the tradition of the *empty*

<sup>779</sup> PARSONS 1987: 146.

<sup>780</sup> FITZMYER 1984: 413-421.

<sup>781</sup> Cf. DAVIES, *He Ascended into Heaven*, p. 44.

<sup>782</sup> PARSONS, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, p. 13.

<sup>783</sup> TASKER 1960: 221-222.



*tomb*, common to all three synoptics (the women come to the tomb, see an angel, leave to tell the disciples and, whilst leaving, Christ appears to them).<sup>784</sup>

In the passage John 20:11-18 is described the episode in which Christ the resurrected shows himself to Mary of Magdala, one of the women who stood at the bottom of the Cross in 19:25. The scene begins with the description of Mary who is crying by the tomb (20:11) and who then receives the good news of the resurrection from two angels (20:12-13). The text portrays a Mary who does not believe or does not yet understand the mystery of the resurrection, but who will be the first to receive the news from Christ himself. On her way back, she sees Jesus, but at first mistakes him for the gardener (20:14-15). Christ, however, calls her name and she recognises him by calling him ‘Παββουί’ (20:16).

In verse 17, Christ tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him and informs her of his Ascension to the Father, all the while sending her to notify his disciples. Here, a link can be observed between Mary’s attempt to touch the resurrected one and the scene in Matthew 28:9, where the myrrh-bearing women take hold of his feet and worship him.<sup>785</sup> However, the difference between the two accounts (Matt 28:9 and Jn 20:17) is that in the first the women clasped Jesus’ feet whereas in the second Mary is forbidden to touch him (here, the content of the message is different). As Frans Neirynck observes ‘this interdiction and the use of a different verb (ἄπτομαι instead of κρατέω) are cited as firm indications against Johannine dependence on Matthew.’<sup>786</sup> In John 20:17, Mary’s intention is that of expressing her adoration and joy at seeing the fulfilment of the resurrection.<sup>787</sup> Joseph Blank observes that the touch (physical contact) represents the principal way through which the man in this world becomes aware of the exterior reality. However, the contact with the resurrected Jesus takes place in another way,

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<sup>784</sup> Cf. LINDARS 1960: 142-147; LILLIE 1965: 117-134. Based on the biblical references BRECK (1986: 227-230) analyses the iconographical tradition of the empty tomb which portrays the myrrh-bearing women and the angel who announces them the Resurrection.

<sup>785</sup> BEASLEY-MURRAY 1987: 376: ‘There is a clear contact between Mary’s attempt to take hold of Jesus and the scene in Matt 28:9, where the women to whom Jesus appears “seized” (ἐκράτησαν) the feet of Jesus and prostrated themselves before him. In this context the term *κρατέω* is virtually synonymous with *ἄπτομαι*.’

<sup>786</sup> NEIRYNCK 1991: 583.

<sup>787</sup> ‘Remembering Eastern customs, we are probably to assume that Mary did just what Matthew describes: She prostrated herself before Jesus and sought to clasp his feet. It was an act of joyful adoration combined with a simple desire to hold Jesus, not because she feared to lose him again, but in a perfectly normal expression of affection.’ BEASLEY-MURRAY 1987: 376.

through faith, word or in Spirit.<sup>788</sup> The demand not to touch Christ (μή μου ἅπτου) seems to suggest the fact that Mary seized (took hold of) his feet or was about to. What John relates does not bear that meaning that ‘Jesus did not allow Mary to touch him (for whatever reason) or that he regarded an act of *proskynesis* inappropriate for someone who failed to grasp the meaning of the new relationship that he had entered into through the resurrection... The issue is that Mary should not “cling” to Jesus, not “hold on” to him.’<sup>789</sup> B. Violet argued upon the use of an Aramaic word (from the stem *dabaq*) in this passage, which means both ‘attach oneself to a person’ and ‘follow’; but this idea is not confirmed by the Latin translation (*noli me tangere*).<sup>790</sup> Thus, the words ‘do not hold me’ are connected with ‘go to my brethren and say to them’.<sup>791</sup> Origen interprets the Lord’s refusal to be touched by Mary saying: ‘But after he had destroyed his enemies through his passion, the Lord, who is mighty in battle and strong [Ps 24:8], required a purification that could be given to him by his Father alone. And this is why he forbids Mary to touch him.’<sup>792</sup>

The fact that Mary was entrusted with delivering the message that Christ has risen and that he showed himself to her, ranks her among the witnesses of the resurrection<sup>793</sup> and, as a result, amongst those who receive a special mission to preach.<sup>794</sup> She becomes God’s messenger to prepare his coming among the apostles and her task, a precondition for the sending of the Holy Spirit.<sup>795</sup>

The repetition of the words ‘mine’ and ‘your’ suggests that a new type of filial relationship develops at the same time as the Ascension.<sup>796</sup> The disciples, called ‘my

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<sup>788</sup> BLANK 1981: 170-171.

<sup>789</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 137. Cf. NICHOLSON 1983: 72-73.

<sup>790</sup> Cited by HAENCHEN 1984: 209-210.

<sup>791</sup> There is no mysterious reason for which Mary Magdalene must not touch the Lord. She received a message from the Lord and must transmit it to the Apostles as fast as possible. Cf. MCGEHEE 1986: 299-302.

<sup>792</sup> ORIGEN, *Commentary on John* 6:287, ACCS – NT 4b: 348.

<sup>793</sup> Mary Magdalene is the first to proclaim the resurrection to the Apostles: Ἐώρακα τὸν κύριον (v. 18b). POTTERIE 1984: 36: ‘Elle a finalement compris que le temps passé des rapports directs avec le Jésus terrestre est révolu: Jésus est ressuscité, il est le Seigneur, il monte définitivement vers le Père, il est chez le Père. Cette découverte ne lui est plus réservée: elle va porter ce message pascal aux disciples.’

<sup>794</sup> The angels who appear to Mary symbolise the Apostles who, in the same way, will be the first to announce to the Church that Christ has risen. TARAIZI 2004: 254-255.

<sup>795</sup> LEE 1995: 37-49.

<sup>796</sup> ‘Die Sehnsucht und das glühende Verlangen seines Herzens ist nicht nur, uns zu retten, sondern uns dadurch zu retten, daß er uns vor seinen Vater stellt, daß er den Vater offenbart und dadurch verherrlicht,

brethren', now become sons of God the Father.<sup>797</sup> In other words, Christ as the second person of the Holy Trinity *is* the Son of the Father from eternity; Christians only *become* the sons of God through adoption and forgiveness.<sup>798</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem explains this through: 'For he did not say, "I ascend to our Father", lest the creatures should be made fellows of the Only Begotten. Instead, he said, "My Father and your Father". He is in one way mine, by nature. He is in another way, yours, by adoption.'<sup>799</sup> Brown, on the other hand, rejects 'the contention that in this passage Jesus is making a careful (and theological distinction between his own relationship to the Father and the relationship of his disciples to the Father, i.e., between his natural sonship and their broader sonship/childhood gained. This passage must be interpreted against the background of Johannine theology: The ascension of which Jesus is speaking in 20:17 will lead to that giving of the Spirit (20:22; also 7:38-39) which will beget the disciples anew from above (3:3) and make them God's children (1:12). Thus Jesus' Father will now become the disciples' Father and they will become Jesus' brothers (and sisters).'<sup>800</sup>

In what the day of the Ascension is concerned, in the Gospel according to John it appears as if it were on the same day as the resurrection. Jerome affirms that the Ascension took place on the same day as the resurrection (*In die dominica Paschae*), but he mentions in other passages, the number of forty days (*Epistola* 59:5; 120:7). Interpreting the episode in the Gospel of John, he affirmed that 'this is the meaning: "Whom you seek dead, you do not deserve to touch alive. If you think that I have not yet ascended to the Father, but have been taken away by the deceit of men, you are unworthy of my touch".'<sup>801</sup> Through this, we realise that Jerome takes "the Ascension to the Father" as referring to the resurrection. Brown clearly distinguishes between the

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das Ziel des Heilswerkes Jesu ist es nach der Andeutung von Jo 20,17, daß wir als seine Brüder Söhne dieses Vaters werden, Ihm, dem Vater, in Liebe zugewandt.' THÜSING 1995: 130.

<sup>797</sup> 'Because of this new relationship, made possible by Jesus' passing from this world to the Father through the hour (see 13:1), they are no longer Jesus' disciples, but his brethren.' MOLONEY 1998: 526; cf. THEOPHYLACT OF OHRID, *Commentary on John* 20:17.

<sup>798</sup> MORRIS 1988.2: 703.

<sup>799</sup> CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catechetical Lectures* 11.18.19, ACCS – NT 4b: 354.

<sup>800</sup> BROWN 1994: 175 n. 245; HAENCHEN 1984: 210: 'He [John] really intends to say that the God of Jesus is now also the God of the disciples, that the Father of Jesus is the same as the Father of the disciples. The distinction in relationship to God between Jesus and the disciples has been abolished and not continued, as will be repeated in verses 21f. in another form.'

<sup>801</sup> *Epistolae* 120:5, cited by DAVIES 1958: 109.

Ascension of Jesus understood in terms of a post-resurrection glorification, and the Ascension after forty days, described in the Acts of the Apostles (1:3).<sup>802</sup>

Lohfink believed that in John's Gospel the Ascension is united with the resurrection and that through the wording used by the author (20:17), one cannot say that the Ascension took place between the Lord's encounter with Mary Magdalene and his coming amongst the apostles (20:19).<sup>803</sup> On the other hand, Peter Atkins, by analysing the later apparitions (21:1-14; 26), claims that the Ascension would have happened during the time span between the resurrection and his coming amongst the apostles.<sup>804</sup> However, Arie W. Zwiep explains thus: 'If we take the larger Johannine context into consideration (the connection ascension-giving of the Spirit) and follow the Johannine understanding of Jesus' ἀνάβασις as a description of Jesus' entire passage to the Father through passion, death, resurrection and ascension, Jn 20:17 seems to make good sense.'<sup>805</sup> Thus, the Ascension has not yet been completed because the Holy Spirit has not yet been sent. The usage of the present tense (ἀνάβαινω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα) suggests imminence; it will not be long before the finalisation of the Ascension.<sup>806</sup> Moreover, in the analysed text we encounter the expression of the evangelist's theology and not a tradition of the Ascension, as is the case in Mark 16:19-20.<sup>807</sup> Also, there is no explicit mention or allusion to Psalm 110. As a result, the hypothesis according to which in John 20:17, the evangelist actually uses the terms of the ascension to express the resurrection, which is understood as being in an indissoluble link with the Ascension, must be taken into account. This is not about a pattern as that in Luke-Acts, where the apparitions take place throughout forty days, and then the Ascension occurs.<sup>808</sup> The entire series of

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<sup>802</sup> BROWN 1970: 1012.

<sup>803</sup> 'Der bereits Auferstandene sagt zwar: οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. Mit dieser Formulierung soll jedoch kaum die Himmelfahrt auf die Zeit zwischen der Begegnung mit Maria und die abendlichen Erscheinung fixiert werden.' LOHFINK 1971: 118.

<sup>804</sup> 'In John's Gospel it is not clear whether these appearances to the disciples are intended to be seen as those of the ascended Christ or whether for his purposes the author does not see the need to draw that distinction. Certainly John does not include any record of an Ascension event, but he does seem to be very aware of the status of Christ as the one who has ascended to the Father.' ATKINS 2001: 48.

<sup>805</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 137.

<sup>806</sup> TASKER 1960: 225.

<sup>807</sup> LOHFINK 1971: 118: 'Gerade von hier aus ist es nicht möglich, sondern sogar warscheinlich, daß Jo 20,17 allein aus der Theologie des Evangelisten und nicht aus einer Himmelfahrtserzählung herzuleiten ist'

<sup>808</sup> 'The Johannine pattern of revelation of the risen one to his own from heaven may well reflect tradition. The peculiarity of John's account becomes then the pre-ascension encounter with Mary.' LOADER 1992: 123.

events, starting with the crucifixion and ending with the Ascension, represents a return to the Father.<sup>809</sup> The Ascension also represents an act of manifestation of Christ's grace through his return to the Father.<sup>810</sup> The same is also confirmed by the language used by Mary in verse 18, elements which do not pertain to the final discourses or the tradition of the Ascension.

In Mary Magdalene's attitude, there can be seen a shift from unbelief and sadness (darkness) to belief and joy (light). This episode (20:11-18) begins by describing a Mary in tears next to the grave and ends by sharing the joy of the resurrection with the apostles. The proof of Mary's having seen the Lord resurrected was enough to believe in the sacrament of the resurrection both for her as well as the ten apostles, and through this, to reach the plenitude of faith.<sup>811</sup> Several critics have found a link between verse 20 and Psalm 22:22-23.<sup>812</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia affirmed that 'through what he said he wanted both to teach his disciples about his resurrection and his ascension. And this is evident from the fact that he showed himself again to the disciples who were in doubt, and he ordered them to touch the wounds on his body in the spots of the nails.'<sup>813</sup> Mary does not mention anything about the angels, but shares with the apostles only the message from Jesus, which is no longer reproduced word for word by the author in verse 20.

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<sup>809</sup> ZWIEP 1997: 138: 'The entire course of events constitutes the "hour" of the Son of Man; the entire sequence of events starting from the crucifixion is Jesus' ἀνάβασις to the Father.' Cf. BROWN 1970: 1013-1014.

<sup>810</sup> 'As He came down from heaven – mythological language again – he will ascend again thither where he previously was (Jn 6:62; cf. Jn 3:13). He will be "elevated" (3:14; 12:32, 34; cf. 8:28); he will be "glorified" (12:23; 13:31f.; 17:1; cf. 7:39; 12:6), glorified with the "glory" that he had in pre-existence with the Father (17:5, 24). His coming and his going belong together as a unit, the unity of his activity as Revealer; this is indicated by the fact that both his coming and his going (3:19 and 12:31) can be termed the judgement and by the fact that both his exaltation and his sending can be regarded as the basis for the gift of eternal life (3:14 and 3:16).' BULTMANN 1958: 35.

<sup>811</sup> According to the tradition in Mk 16:10-11, the apostles refused to believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene. BEASLEY-MURRAY 1987: 378.

<sup>812</sup> 'The possibility becomes more interesting when we reflect that "Lord" (*kyrios*) is truly the name of the risen Jesus, and that in LXX *kyrios* renders the tetragrammaton, YHWH, which is the proper name of God.' BROWN 1970: 1017.

<sup>813</sup> THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA, *Commentary on John 7.20.17*, ACCS – NT 4b: 352.

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